Thank You For the Venom

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by memequeen1127

Summary

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>
> Mr. Metcalf hummed. “What about lovers?”
>
> Will made a choking noise and Hannibal smiled widely.
>
> “OBJECTION!” The government prosecutor yelled.
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> ~
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> An intermission story covering Hannibal's trial and the three years of separation before the Red Dragon arc. Includes Hannibal being naughty in prison and Will having a hard time of... everything.

Notes

> I'm not going to lie, this is going to have a lot of angst and pining. But, we really get to see how Hannibal and Will deal with their separation during Hannibal's trial and incarceration. Technically they don't interact directly in this, but they do indirectly - many times. You'll see what I mean as you read it :)
>
> Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The last time Hannibal saw Will, it wasn't in his house in Wolf Trap, like Will would have probably preferred. Instead, it was in a courtroom.

The courtroom itself was elegant, with classy mahogany furniture and a tall ceiling. It reminded Hannibal of the courtroom used when Will was on trial, and he felt his blood calm as he relished in experiencing the same thing as his beloved, about two years apart.

This time, with Hannibal on trial, things were much different.

The gallery was packed with a mix of journalists, victims' families, Hannibal's past acquaintances, and the occasional fan. However, none of those people held a second of Hannibal's attention, even with the occasional shout and quiet sobbing.

He only had eyes for Will.

Will was the star witness for the prosecution, along with Alana Bloom and Jack Crawford. Unlike Alana and Jack, who both stared daggers at Hannibal every time they were in the room together, Will didn't look at Hannibal.

Not once.

It brought a slight pain to Hannibal's chest, but he had expected no less. Will had rejected him quite clearly after Hannibal carried him home after the fun at the Verger estate. He truly hadn't expected Will to do that, not with so much harsh finality, but it was simply another fond reminder that he could never entirely predict his dear Will. Likewise, Hannibal was proud that Will hadn't expected him to turn himself in.

Hannibal wasn't having a bad time in federal custody, all things considered. After he was processed by Jack's forensic team, he was held at the BSHCI in a cell much like Will's when he was remanded there. That, combined with the experience of being on trial, made Hannibal feel like he understood Will just a little bit better.

The trial wasn't too bad, either. His lawyer was a very respectful man by the name of Byron Metcalf, someone who Hannibal had on retainer for years who hadn't shown a smidge of emotion at finding out his longest client was actually a cannibalistic serial killer. Hannibal quite liked him.

The only thing Hannibal didn't like about the experience so far was Will's refusal to look at him. But that, too, had its enjoyable moments. It was incredibly amusing for Hannibal to watch Will squirm and fight to keep his eyes off him as the lawyers questioned him.

"Why were you in Italy last month, Mr. Graham?" Mr. Metcalf asked.

Hannibal watched Will grit his teeth. "Vacation."

"You stayed in Palermo first, correct?" Will nodded. "There is a priest at the Norman Chapel there willing to testify that he saw you visit the church every day for two weeks straight. Why?"

"Thought I'd find religion," Will drawled. "I heard that Chapel was one of the most beautiful."

Hannibal smiled fondly at his thinly-veiled sarcasm.

Mr. Metcalf raised his eyebrows. "So it had nothing to do the fact that the mutilated body of a man with a remarkable resemblance to you was found there just two weeks after you started visiting?"

Will huffed. “Hannibal did that. I’m sure he figured out where I was.”

“How?”

“I don’t know, he’s done it before. He did it that time too,” Will lied.

Hannibal’s smile grew bigger. He hadn’t known Will was there, waiting for him. It had been a pleasant surprise when Hannibal arrived with his gift.

“What about Florence?” Mr. Metcalf changed gears.

“What about it?”

“You were seen at the Uffizi Gallery, talking to my client in front of a Botticelli. Why didn’t you call the police then?”

Will readjusted in his seat. “He had a knife on me. I had to go with him quietly or he would kill me.”

Mr. Metcalf looked at him skeptically. “Why were you there in the first place?”

Will yawned. “Admiring the art.”

Hannibal knew he should be feeling sorry for his lawyer, who was just doing his best to defend Hannibal, but he was having too much fun watching Will lie under oath.

Mr. Metcalf narrowed his eyes. “What, exactly, is your relationship with my client?”

That one made Will pause. “He used to be my psychiatrist. He’s tried to kill me on multiple occasions, since I found out what he truly was.”

Mr. Metcalf approached the witness stand. “You say he used to be your psychiatrist, Mr. Graham, but Agent Crawford and Dr. Bloom have both already testified that your relationship was closer than that. Would you say you were friends?”

“I’d say he’s my closest friend,” Will replied sardonically.

Mr. Metcalf hummed. “What about lovers?”

Will made a choking noise and Hannibal smiled widely. He hadn’t instructed his lawyer to ask questions of this type, but was incredibly glad that he did, just for the pleasure of watching Will struggle to maintain his composure.

“OBJECTION!” The government prosecutor yelled.

Hannibal was very amused now, and looked to the judge — a red-faced, portly man — for his ruling.

The judge huffed. “Overruled. Answer the question, Mr. Graham.”

“No, definitely not,” Will coughed, having recovered from the unexpected question.

Mr. Metcalf smiled triumphantly. “That’s a rather unconvincing reaction, Mr. Graham.”

“Objection! Argumentative!” the prosecutor exclaimed.

“Withdrawn,” Mr. Metcalf waved them off. “Maybe you weren’t lovers, but surely your relationship was more than platonic?”

Hannibal watched in delight as Will leaned forward to get in his lawyer’s face and narrowed his eyes. “No.”

Mr. Metcalf tapped his fingers on the witness stand. “If you say so. Tell me about the Verger estate.”

“What about it?” Will ground out.

“All the forensic evidence recovered points to you assaulting Mason Verger’s aid, Cordell. How do you explain that?”

“Self-defense.”

Mr. Metcalf raised an eyebrow. “You bit his cheek off.”

“Self-defense,” Will repeated. “Hannibal’s the one who cut his entire face off later.”

“We are not here to discuss the actions my client committed, Mr. Graham, that much has already been established. We are here to determine whether he was insane at the time of committing them.”

“I’m not a psychiatrist, I really can’t testify to his sanity.”

“No, but you are his closest friend, as you just informed us.”

Hannibal could see Will squirming and trying his best to fight the instinct to look at him. “I think Dr. Hannibal Lecter knows exactly what he’s doing at all times, and the consequences of those actions. I also think his thought processes are so different from everyone else’s that we have no choice but to call him insane, for lack of a better word to describe him.”

Hannibal smiled with pride. Will really did know him best.

“OBJECTION!” The prosecutor called again, frustrated. “Calls for speculation!”

“Withdrawn,” Mr. Metcalf smirked. “Thank you, Mr. Graham. No further questions.”

It went on like that for weeks. Hannibal’s case was so high profile that both the prosecution and the defense went back and forth on producing expert witnesses to deliberate on his sanity. The actual evidence part was glossed over, since Hannibal pled guilty and never denied having done the crimes he was accused of. He winked at Alana whenever she mistakenly caught his eye to remind her of that fact.

Will was called multiple times to testify about events, and Hannibal could tell he hated it. He didn’t complain, but he would sit in the witness chair stonily and stubbornly avoid eye contact with Hannibal. Whenever he wasn’t testifying, he sat in the gallery with everyone else to watch the proceedings. He never missed a day, to Hannibal’s delight.

When the trial became boring and Will was no longer being called to testify, Hannibal told his lawyer he wanted to take the stand in his own defense, as was his constitutional right. Mr. Metcalf wasn’t sure, but Hannibal assured him that it would only convince the jury of his questionable sanity. Hannibal hated the prospect of being labeled insane, but he liked the power that came from beating the death penalty on an obviously false defense.

“Dr. Lecter, you informed me you wanted to exercise your right to testify at your own trial. Would you mind telling the jury why that is?” Mr. Metcalf started off.

“Certainly,” Hannibal said smoothly, putting on his charming smile. From his position on the stand, he had an incredible view of Will determinedly not looking at him in the gallery. “I

wanted to clarify the issue of my state of mind. Experts can speculate all day, but they cannot tell you the first-hand reality."

"And what is the reality of your sanity, Dr. Lecter?"

"I am not insane," Hannibal said simply. "I kill people and eat them because it is the natural order of things. They are pigs, and I am only adhering to the natural food chain."

"And you know this because…?"

"Because it was revealed to me when I was very young," Hannibal explained, eyes boring into Will and willing him to understand. "It is nothing less than the slaughtering and consuming of animals, because that's what these people were."

Mr. Metcalf hummed. "Do you mean to say that in your mind, people are no more than pigs? And you are the only true human?"

Hannibal's smile was all teeth. "One of two, formerly three."

He did not elaborate as the jury descended into frantic murmurs, but Hannibal could tell Will understood exactly what he meant by the way his eyes screwed shut and he clenched onto the seat in front of him.

There were no expert witnesses after that, nor any further testimony, as both sides rested their cases. The next day, Hannibal was only in the courtroom for a total of about 15 minutes before the jury came back and declared him guilty but mentally ill. The judge thus declared him legally insane and sentenced him to life at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

That day in court was the last day Hannibal saw Will.

Hannibal had already been residing at the BSHCI for the duration of his trial, but when he was officially sentenced, he was moved to a cell Alana Bloom specially designed for him. She was now the director of the institute instead of Frederick Chilton, who had quit psychiatry to pursue his literary career, courtesy of Hannibal.

Alana had repurposed a number of cells in the basement to construct Hannibal's cage. Instead of bars, there was now glass with a few holes for air flow; the large clear wall allowing for an unobstructed view of visitors. The other walls of Hannibal's cell were ornate, made up of white wood and lined with golden trim. There was even a mock fireplace to give Hannibal the illusion of an elegant parlor.

Overall, he quite liked his new prison cell. It was much roomier and better suited to Hannibal's tastes than the last one. He was also amused at being given special treatment by Alana, who was obviously afraid that Hannibal would spill the beans about the truth of her late brother-in-law's demise, or at the very least make life hell for the orderlies of the hospital.

However, Hannibal had no intention of doing anything of the sort. He made a promise to Alana and Margot, and he always kept his promises. He also decided to be well-behaved in order to retain visiting privileges. Hannibal didn't care about the state of his cage as much as he cared about his privileges. He wouldn't sacrifice his chances of seeing Will again just so he could make a tasty snack out of some poor orderly's fingers, although the idea was tempting.

The day Hannibal was moved into the new cell, Alana visited him for the first time since their dual occupancy at the BSHCI. Hannibal was busy arranging the books, drawing paper, and pencils so thoughtfully provided for him but he perked up the moment he smelled her flowery perfume.

"I must thank you for my new accommodations," Hannibal greeted. "Are they a reward of some kind?"

He turned around to face Alana through the glass, and could clearly see her sour expression of displeasure from where he stood near the bolted-down metal table.

"A congratulations," she answered. "For being declared guilty but officially insane."

“Your congratulations are premature. The judge may have declared me as such at my trial, but my lawyer was quick to inform me that the official verdict will take a few years to finalize.” Hannibal smiled gently. “Who knows what will happen in that period of time.”

Alana stepped closer to the glass separating them and spoke sharply. “I know what you’re up to, Hannibal, and you’re wrong. Will is not going to visit you. He is not going to miss you. He is not going to break you out.”

Hannibal’s smile did not waver. “He told me the same thing, Alana. And I assure you, I am not up to anything. I am content to enjoy this experience and its novelty while it lasts.”

Alana laughed coldly. “Please. I’m going to have so much fun watching you sit in here, confined and cut off from the rest of the world, *from Will,* for years. It’s not what you deserve, but it’s as good as I’m going to get.”

Hannibal turned away from her, tired of their conversation and wondering what picture of Will he would draw first to grace the new walls of his cell. “Whatever you say, Alana. If you’ll excuse me, I have some decorating to do.”

Will was never mentioned after that first time. Hannibal had no need to discuss his beloved with others, though he thought of him all the time. He thought of their last conversation at Will’s house in Wolf Trap, and how Will had pushed him away. Hannibal didn’t want to dwell on the melancholy Will’s rejection brought him, but he found he could not forget that moment they shared together any more than he could forget all the other moments they have shared together, over these past few years.

Days passed in his new cell. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. Hannibal was not bothered by Will’s absence; he knew he needed time to heal after their last attempts at killing each other. While Hannibal waited, he thought of Will, and he sketched.

He sketched Will: his hands, his neck, his face, his hair. Hannibal drew other things as well, scenes of his favorite cities or favorite buildings, but he drew Will the most. He spent hours and countless supplies sketching his beloved in all manners of life — but never in death. Will would be beautiful in death, Hannibal was sure, but he had come to realize that he preferred Will alive. Living, breathing, fighting, and killing. That was the Will he loved.

Hannibal drew him like that, committing to memory Will's anger, his pain, and his rare joy. Hannibal drew scenes they had shared together, as well as many that Hannibal had never witnessed but wished with his entire being that he had. He sketched Will fishing, and sleeping, and killing.

He hoarded the drawings in his cell, showing off some on the walls for Alana to twitch at but hiding the best ones, the most beautiful ones, in the pages of books. Those drawings of Will were for no one's eyes but his own.

Alana did not tell Hannibal about Will, and Hannibal did not ask.

A year passed before Hannibal started to consider the option that Will was not going to visit him.

The option was one that was always there, lurking in the back of his mind, but one that Hannibal refused to acknowledge until now. There was a lot lurking in his mind that Hannibal refused to dwell on until now.

The pain that came from the possibility of Will not visiting cracked open the room inside Hannibal's mind palace that held the rest of the pain Will brought him, the pain that he hadn't resolved yet. Hannibal thought about the words Will had said to him during the last time they spoke, for the first time since it happened.

I'm not going to miss you. I'm not going to find you. I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are, or what you do. I don't want to think about you anymore.

Each word Will spoke then hit Hannibal like a punch in the gut. He had taken the hits patiently, doing nothing to defend himself. He felt their pain as he spoke to Chiyoh and

waited for Jack to descend, and now he was opening that pain back up.

Will's rejection was like the stab of a thousand knives in the heart. His heart was broken, it was bleeding, but it had no doubts as to who it belonged to. Hannibal reflected how that was the main difference between how he was feeling now and how brokenhearted he was in Florence.

In Florence, when he killed Antony Dimmond and shaped his body into a heart, he was aching from the fresh sting of betrayal. He was reaching out to Will, shouting at him just how much he had changed him, and proclaiming his love for him. There was pain there, yes, but there was also passion.

The passion was still there, Hannibal supposed now, but it was of a different kind. Instead of a white-hot stab, it was more of a full-body ache, the kind that seared into his whole being and refused to relinquish him.

When Will had rejected him at his home, Hannibal did not lash out like the last time. He did not gut Will, or even hurt him. After being so close to killing him in Florence, Hannibal realized he did not want that. He remembered cutting into Will's skull and feeling nothing but revulsion where there should have been satisfaction. Hannibal realized, when sitting in the chair in Will's home, listening to Will's words carving into his heart, that he was not going to kill him for his rejection.

But there was also no way that Hannibal was ever going to let Will go.

He had been entirely honest when he surrendered. He wanted Will to know where he was and where he would always be. Hannibal thought it was an intelligent move, one that Will had not expected. He thought that once Will knew where he was, he wouldn't be able to stay away. After all, he had crossed an entire ocean for Hannibal. Surely a prison was less daunting.

But after a year without Will making an appearance, Hannibal realized that he may have miscalculated.

He was rarely wrong about anything, and of all the things to be wrong about this was the worst. Will was what mattered most, what Hannibal loved most in this world. Wasting away in this prison cell, Hannibal was constantly aching and longing for him. Just a glimpse, just a brief touch, would satiate him for months. But instead, he had nothing.

He knew nothing, as well. Alana did not tell Hannibal anything about Will, which he knew was intended to be punishment. Hannibal did not ask, because his insurmountable pride would not allow her to have the satisfaction. He was hurting for Will, and for the first time in his life he felt scared. He was scared that he would never see his beloved again.

But, Hannibal also had hope. He was an optimist at heart.

He would wait. He could escape if he wanted to, but that wasn't what Hannibal wanted. He wanted Will to come to him first. Nothing would change if Hannibal sought him out. He wanted Will to come to him, completely of his own free will, and give in to his desire to be with him. Nothing else would satisfy Hannibal.

He gave up everything for Will — his established life, his career, his freedom, his heart. The possibility that it was all for nothing was earth-shattering. It was also one that Hannibal had not allowed himself to consider, until recently.

Until Will did not visit him after an entire year of incarceration.

Until Hannibal started to forget what his face looked like.

The day when Hannibal started to draw Will and discovered that he could not remember the exact way Will's eyes wrinkled when he smiled was the first and only day Hannibal Lecter shed a tear in his prison cell.

It was a small tear, unnoticeable to the cameras thankfully, and the only one of its kind. Nevertheless, it was powerful. It made Hannibal think about everything he'd been ignoring and spurred him into action.

He would not escape, but that did not mean he could not be kept informed of Will's life. The ignorance Alana was bestowing upon him was making his blood boil. Hannibal decided to both spite her and find out about Will in one fell swoop.

Barney was Hannibal's favorite orderly at the BSHCI. He was quiet and friendly, but most importantly he was polite. He did not treat Hannibal any differently than he did his co-workers, which was something Hannibal valued. Discourtesy was ugly, and unfortunately Hannibal was subjected to much of it by the various servants of the American criminal justice system.

Barney was different, a difference that Hannibal could exploit. Oh, he could threaten any old orderly, but to accomplish what he planned — a constant, steady stream of information about Will — Hannibal would have to establish a lasting relationship with someone he could trust would not go to Alana at the first opportunity.

It would take some prodding, but Hannibal was willing to put in the effort. He refused to draw anymore, any pictures he would create of Will unsatisfactory. He needed something to focus on beside the ache inside his soul resulting from Will's absence.

The next time Barney came by his cell to deliver his daily meal, Hannibal whispered to him through the glass. "Thank you, Barney. You are always so polite to me. Where did you learn to be so courteous?"

Barney hesitated but answered his question as he slid the tray through the slot. "My grandma. She always taught me to mind my manners, or people wouldn't respect me."

"Quite right," Hannibal approved, slowly making his way to the drop-box. "I must thank you, Barney. I am quite grateful for how you treat me."

"It's nothing, Dr. Lecter," he waved off. "Just doing my job."

"Yes, it is your job," Hannibal hummed. "Surely not the most enjoyable, but it must pay well considering your lack of formal education. Still, I imagine you require money to provide a good life for your children, more than employment at this institution can provide."

Barney looked at Hannibal suspiciously as he took his evening meal out of the slot. “Respectfully, doctor, that’s none of your business. I’ll be back in 30 minutes to collect your tray. Please have your dinner finished by then.”

He left, and Hannibal smiled. Barney’s defensiveness indicated that he did indeed have children to care for. Children were always expensive, and Hannibal was pleased that he had the funds available to help Barney and his children, if the orderly so chose.

It took a few weeks of slightly invasive questions and heaps of charm, but Hannibal finally got Barney to warm up to him.

Their relationship had progressed to the point where now, Barney was at ease around him and smiled whenever Hannibal offered one of his own. Hannibal knew the names of his children, that they were twins, and details of their plans for college.

“They both want to go to the same school, and they got in, but it’s expensive. I’m lucky that they’re both mighty smart and got merit scholarships, but that only covers half of tuition,” Barney confided in him one night during dinner. He had taken to staying with Hannibal as he ate his meal so that they would have more time to socialize. “I’ve got this job, and it helps, but it’s still hard. I just want to give them the best future.”

He sighed heavily before he suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! I’m sorry to complain to you, Dr. Lecter. That wasn’t very polite of me. You don’t want to hear about my life’s problems when you’re stuck in here with yours.”

Hannibal smiled like a shark smelling blood in the water. “On the contrary, Barney, your problems help distract me from my own. But after hearing you speak, I think I may have a solution for us both. If you’d like to hear it, that is.”

Hannibal eyed the camera’s blinking light in the corner and was grateful that Alana hadn’t deemed fit to bug his cell like Frederick used to do with his patients.

Barney hesitated, but his suspicion wasn't nearly as strong as his curiosity after days of Hannibal chipping away at it.

He sighed. "What?"

Hannibal set his fork down. "I propose an arrangement. I will ask you for nothing except information and the occasional loose leaf paper, nothing that would support a jailbreak. In return, I will donate some of my personal funds to your children's education account."

Barney did not immediately leave or say no, which Hannibal took as a good sign to continue. "Alana tells me nothing, Barney. I merely wish to stay informed about the outside world, and helping your children attend the university of their dreams is a bonus."

Barney stayed tense for a few more moments, thinking hard about Hannibal's offer. Then he sighed, and all the tension left his body.

"If I do this," he asked wearily, "do you give me your word that you will not harm me or my family?"

"I do," Hannibal said with no hesitation. "You have done nothing to warrant that, but if it helps to ease your concerns, then I give you my word."

Barney sighed again and nodded. "Thank you."

His eyes met Hannibal's and he leaned closer to the glass. "What do you want me to find out?"

Hannibal licked his lips. "First I must stress the confidential nature of this exchange. I'm sure you do not want others knowing about our relationship, and I feel the same. This is only to be our secret, as they say."

With Barney's tired nod, Hannibal continued. "Thank you, Barney. I wish for you to find out information regarding Will Graham. Where he is, what he's doing. How he looks. I want a full report, Barney."

Barney did not look surprised and only sighed again. "I can do that, Dr. Lecter. The money for my kids…?"

"It will be deposited into their fund from an untraceable bank account, a certain amount after every occasion you provide me with information," Hannibal assured.

Barney eyed him again but nodded. He did not look too shaken to find himself in an illicit deal with Hannibal Lecter, and Hannibal found himself grateful for Barney's intelligence once again. He finished his dinner in silence and dutifully returned his tray to the drop-box. Barney retrieved it and nodded at Hannibal again before turning to leave for the night.

"Barney," Hannibal called out, making the orderly pause. "I would also like a picture."

Chapter End Notes

Kudos and comments greatly appreciated!

Will's POV is next, and folks.... he is not having a good time :(

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> “Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,” a tired voice recited. “This is Barney, how can I help you?”
>
> All of a sudden, Will couldn’t breathe.

Chapter Notes

> Wow, thanks for all the positive feedback on the first chapter! I hope y'all like this chapter as well. Enjoy Will's POV!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will walked out of the courtroom after Hannibal’s sentencing hearing and felt like he was leaving a piece of himself behind.

He had been parted from Hannibal before; the first time, for a few months when Will was institutionalized, and the second time, for many aching months when Hannibal was in Europe. Will was way past being concerned about the unhealthy codependency he shared with Hannibal. Concern about it had turned into craving for it.

Separation had been tough, those times, but Will got through it because they were still conjoined. Even apart, his and Hannibal’s lives revolved around each other.

Will had already decided that this time was going to be different.

We’re conjoined. I’m curious if either of us can survive separation.

Will wanted to know if the piece of himself he was leaving behind would revert him back to how he was, before Hannibal. He wanted to know who he was without Hannibal's influence, and without their mutual codependency.

Will was terrified of what he would find. He almost sprang up during Hannibal's hearing and shouted that it was all a mistake, that Hannibal was innocent and he could prove it. It was an impossible fantasy, of course, but Will still thought about it. He thought about it and wanted to do it so bad that he was shaking in his seat.

Will was scared of what he was without Hannibal only slightly less than he was scared of what he was *with* Hannibal.

He needed space. He knew he needed space to tear himself free of Hannibal's grasp, to discover who he was now, to see if he could survive it. Will *knew* he needed it.

But that didn't stop his body from screaming at him that it was wrong.

Will ignored his body and forced himself out of the courthouse and into his car. He caught a glimpse of Alana and Jack lingering in the parking lot, but he ignored them too. He didn't feel particularly angry at them, but he didn't want to talk to them.

Will drove back to Wolf Trap, stopping by the kennel on the way to his house. He had missed his dogs desperately, and felt a bit better as they swarmed him, barking and begging for attention.

"Hey guys," he murmured, kneeling down and petting them to stop the shaking of his hands. Winston noticed his mood and whined, nosing at Will's chest. Will managed a small upturn of the lips and accepted the hug, burying his face into his dog's shaggy fur.

It felt nice to be with his dogs again. They were his family, and now he was taking them home.

Will stood and whistled, directing his pack to pile into his small car. They all fit, jumbled up together in the back. Will put Buster in his lap, and the spoiled little dog squirmed around the entire drive back to his house.

As soon as Will stepped into his house, he knew it was no longer home. He had stayed in the city for the entirety of the trial as a way to force himself into attending court when he wasn't required to testify. The hotel wasn't dog-friendly, but it contained no memories of Hannibal. Will was only able to go to court and see him during the day because he wasn't constantly being reminded of him at night. It was bearable.

Here, Will could already tell it wouldn't be bearable. Everywhere he looked, all around his house, the ghost of Hannibal lived.

Will saw him in the kitchen, standing in front of the sink when he had "helped" Will after he threw up Abigail's ear. Will saw Hannibal sitting by his bed, holding that book of equations and looking at him with open, honest eyes that were holding back tears.

The memories were like a stab to his heart, a constant searing pain that reminded him of what he did.

He rejected Hannibal.

Will hated that he felt guilty about it, but he did. God, he did.

Hannibal's pain was Will's pain, and that was the problem. They were too enmeshed, too conjoined for Will's taste. He did not want to become Hannibal and was scared he already was. Will needed space, and Hannibal needed to be caged. This separation was for the best.

Will tried to ignore the little voice inside him whispering that Hannibal's goal was not for Will to fuse to him at all, but rather for Will to grow into his own unique person.

I can feed the caterpillar and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.

Will clenched his eyes shut, trying to force Hannibal's past words to him out of his mind. This was the exact problem — he couldn't stop thinking about Hannibal while in this house. There were too many memories, too many whispers. Will needed to leave. He *would* leave.

After feeding the dogs dinner and collapsing into bed, Will sighed. He was exhausted, but didn't want to sleep. He knew what he would find in his dreams.

He succumbed to sleep eventually, after half a bottle of cheap whiskey. As he drifted off, the only thought comforting him was the promise that tomorrow, he'd sort everything out and he'd never have to spend another night in this house again.

Will woke up as soon as the sun rose, the golden light shining through the window and warming his cheek. For a moment he felt peace, before his brain kicked in and reminded him where he was.

The violent intrusion of memories was only manageable because Will had a plan to keep them at bay.

He got out of bed, groaning, and started the day. The first day, Will grimaced, of the rest of his life.

Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?

Mine? Before you, and after you.

This was after Hannibal. Or at least, Will was going to try and make it that way. He was going to *try*, even if he had to fight against every single cell in his body to do so.

By the time he finished feeding the dogs and himself a modest breakfast, Will had almost completely woken up. He eyed his dresser of clean clothes, but instead of being a responsible adult and getting ready for the day, he grabbed his laptop and settled back into bed.

He had never gone through the process of selling a house before. Before Wolf Trap, the only other homes he'd had without his father were a small dorm room, and a shabby apartment in New Orleans that he had no trouble leaving after the lease ran out.

Will had come to realize that he was more than capable of dealing with novel experiences. Some, he was even naturally gifted in. All it took to unlock his talent was a little push of opportunity.

Will shook his head to clear the thoughts that were starting to veer into dangerous territory. It hadn't even been 24 hours since he'd last seen Hannibal. Couldn't his mind give him a little break? He surely deserved one.

Will sighed and tried to focus on the task at hand. Fingers flying over the keys, he searched the internet. *How to sell your house. Selling house fast. Quick and cheap realty.* It took a few tries, but soon enough he landed on a promising website.

We buy houses quick and easy! The webpage practically screamed in bold letters. *Call now for a consultation!*

Will entered the number into his phone and just realized that it might be too early to call when the call connected and a sleepy voice answered. "Hello?"

"Hi," Will said, then paused. "Uh, can I sell my house to you?"

Silence, then: “Don’t you know what time it is?” A sigh. “Nevermind, I’m up now. Yeah this is Pete, yeah you can sell me your house. When do you want me to come take a look? This weekend?”

“Actually, Pete,” Will exhaled. “Are you free to come by today? As soon as possible?”

Another pause. “Uh, yeah I guess so. Got somewhere you need to be? Leaving town in a hurry?”

“Something like that,” Will exhaled.

He spent about ten more minutes on the phone with Pete, working out all the details and firmly explaining that yes, he did want to leave soon, today if possible. Pete said that should work, but told Will not to expect much money from an impromptu sale. Will reassured him that it was fine, he didn’t expect to get a large sum. Just a fair amount to start him somewhere new.

After hanging up with the sort-of shady realtor, Will looked around at the collection of items scattered around his house and started to sort them. He would be leaving most of it behind, as he never had any strong attachments to material items, but there were some things he would take with him, if only to save money from buying replacements later.

Mattress, dresser, table, chair. Dog beds and food. Most of the kitchen stuff. He wished he could take the piano, as he used to enjoy making music to drown out the darkness in his mind. But now, every time he looked at the keys he was reminded of Hannibal’s pristine harpsichord.

There were a few other objects Will decided to take with him, and he spent the time before the realtor showed up packing boxes. He dragged himself to the shower too, hoping that Pete would appreciate his attempt at personal hygiene.

Sometime after Will succeeded in sorting most of his things, there was a knock at the door.

“Thanks for coming,” Will greeted, ushering Pete inside. The guy was heavy-set with a strong face, and Will immediately clocked him as the “no-nonsense” type. He liked that.

Pete looked around the house and raised his eyebrows.

“This is a nice place you got here.” He hesitated. “You could probably make a lot more than what I’m offering, if you–”

“No,” Will interrupted. “I want to be gone today.”

Pete shrugged. “Better for me.” He produced a thick white envelope and handed it to Will. “We have a deal?”

Will counted the large bills and nodded. It was enough for a few month’s rent and living, wherever he ended up landing.

“Come back tonight. Anything I leave is yours.”

They shook hands and Pete left, his entire visit taking no less than 15 minutes. Will let his dogs out in the yard one last time and started loading up his car. He didn’t have a lot of boxes, but he was taking a fair amount of furniture with him. It wouldn’t all fit in his car, especially with his dogs, so Will rolled out a small, old trailer from his garage. By the time he was done loading everything properly and hitching the trailer to his car, Will’s muscles were aching and he was starving.

He took another shower, spending more time than necessary in his bathroom to simply dwell in the space. He remembered Hannibal setting him on the toilet and cleaning dried blood off his chest when he had been paralyzed after the Verger estate. He remembered the soft words they exchanged then, and the harsh words Will had hurled at Hannibal a few hours after.

Will stayed in the shower until his hands pruned, and his heart pulled him into the hallway where there were more memories of Hannibal.

Will hated that he was so conflicted about Hannibal. Nothing was simple with him, and every feeling Will felt towards him was matched with another, clashing one. Feeling too much was always Will's problem, but it used to be confined to other people's emotions flooding into him, not his own spilling out.

He managed to scrounge around his kitchen and find a can of chowder in his cabinet. While it microwaved, Will gripped the counter and took deep breaths. He tried not to think about Hannibal in this house, so then he thought about Hannibal in his old house back in Baltimore. But that wasn't any better, and Will's mind drifted to when he saw Hannibal in Florence, in front of the Botticelli.

If I saw you everyday, forever Will, I would remember this time.

Will gasped and pushed the memory away.

He had no doubt that Hannibal would remember that reunion, just as Will couldn't forget it, no matter how hard he tried. Memories were all Hannibal had now, after all. Prison wasn't conducive to forming pleasant new ones.

The microwave dinged and Will took his soup quickly, trying to focus on the food instead of the wave of guilt that came from the reminder of Hannibal in prison. Will had put him there, no matter what Hannibal *thought* he was doing. It was Will's design, and he had dutifully seen it through with the trial and the sentencing.

Hannibal was going to spend the rest of his life in prison. For Will.

Will had no doubt the man could break out if he wanted to. Hannibal was the most lethal, cunning monster he'd ever seen. He only ever did what he wanted to do, and right now Hannibal wanted to stay in prison. Because he thought he would lose Will if he didn't.

Will knew, deep down, that he wouldn't. They were connected now, conjoined. Will wanted to rip that bond out with his teeth, but at the same time he wanted to cradle it like something

precious. It had taken all of his energy to manipulate Hannibal into turning himself in and going through with the trial. At the same time, it was easy. Mindless.

Similar to how leaving town now was simultaneously the easiest and hardest thing Will had ever done.

He was running away, like a coward, but he didn't care. He needed to escape his memories and feelings for Hannibal. There was just *so much* that Will was suffocating under the weight of it all.

I'm curious if either of us can survive separation.

Will was barely surviving with Hannibal. He had enough mental and physical scars to prove it, some still oozing fresh blood. Will wanted to know if he would — *could* — survive without Hannibal. Without his home. Without his heart.

He finished his soup, left his phone on the counter, packed the dogs into the car, and drove away.

Will headed north. He drove through Maryland and into Pennsylvania. He would've driven farther, but the whining of his dogs and the droop of his eyelids convinced him to pull off at the first dog-friendly motel he saw.

He fed the dogs and himself dinner from one of the packed boxes, almost mechanically. The fatigue from moving had caught up to him, and with a huffed laugh, he thought that he wouldn't need any whiskey to knock him out tonight.

Will collapsed onto the thin, cheap bed with a sigh. Buster jumped up on the bed and snuggled up beside him, earning a fond smile from Will. He scratched the little dog behind the ears, and looked around to see the rest of his dogs settle in for the night as well. Will was glad he decided to bring them along. They were his family, after all.

The only family he had left.

Will pulled Buster close, closed his eyes, and drifted off to sleep.

His dreams were haunting as usual, and full of things he'd rather forget. In addition to the normal bad memories and regrets, however, Will was subjected to a new nightmare that night.

He dreamed of Hannibal. Or, more specifically, he dreamed of Hannibal in prison.

Will hadn't let himself imagine Hannibal caged in his waking hours, so now his mind was forcing him to think about it while he slept.

In his dream, Hannibal was sitting on a thin, tiny prison bed. He was behind bars, in the same type of old-fashioned, grimy cell that Will had occupied during his own stay at the BSHCI. Will's stomach rolled at the sight, remembering how it felt to be in a cell like that.

Hannibal, with his obsession with luxury and aesthetics, must hate it even more.

Will was outside the cell, close to the bars.

"I'm sorry," his voice cracked. "I'm sorry."

Hannibal did not look at him, his gaze calmly focused on the grimy sink.

"Why are you sorry?" He asked softly. "Isn't this what you wanted?"

“Yes. No. I-I don’t know,” Will stammered. “This isn’t what *you* wanted.”

Hannibal’s lips curved up. “How can you say that, dear Will? I turned myself in willingly.”

“Only because I manipulated you into doing so,” Will whispered, bringing his hands up to grip the bars. “And you still have no idea.”

Hannibal hummed. “You feel both proud and ashamed of that.”

Will laughed hysterically. “This isn’t a therapy session, doctor.”

“No, it’s not,” Hannibal said smoothly, continuing to avoid Will’s frantic eyes. “It doesn’t need to be. I know what you’re thinking and feeling better than you do.”

Will gasped and tightened his grip on the bars.

“I don’t know the same for you. I can see you, but only the glimpses you allow me too,” he whispered. “I want to see more, to see *everything*.”

Hannibal finally turned to look at him, cocking his head to the side.

“You are not ready to pay the price for that.”

Will groaned and tugged on the bars of the cell, trying to bend or break them. Anything to gain entrance towards Hannibal.

“I want to, I want to be ready, *I want to I want to I want to!* —”

Will rubbed his hands raw and bloody trying to move the bars to get to Hannibal, but all he managed to do was repeat those words over and over again, screaming.

He woke up with a jolt, wheezing and covered in a cold sweat.

Buster yelped beside him, protesting the rapid movement, but Will ignored his dogs for now and tried to hold back a panic attack.

He focused on counting his fingers. One, two, three, all the way up to ten. He did that a few times before his breathing evened out, and he felt solid enough to get out of bed and stagger to the motel bathroom.

He gripped the plastic countertop and stared at his reflection in the mirror. He was a mess; his hair was ruffled and sticking to his sweaty skin, his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes were wide awake. Will turned on the faucet and splashed his face a few times, grateful for the refreshing, cool water.

It had been weeks since he had a nightmare that bad. It wasn't particularly violent, but the sheer terror Will felt during the dream was concerning. How terrified he was at being apart from Hannibal, both physically and mentally.

If Will was honest with himself, the nightmare wasn't surprising. He had been repressing his feelings towards Hannibal over the entirety of the trial, and taking the physical step away from him today had pushed his subconscious over the edge. His mind was screaming at him, demanding to process all the tangled emotions surrounding Hannibal.

Will was tired of it. He was exhausted from how much space Hannibal occupied in his mind, blurring them together. Will's empathy already made it difficult to separate himself from other people, but Hannibal was on an entirely different level. Will hated it.

He hated how he was so closely tied to Hannibal. Will was at the point now that he didn't know who he was without Hannibal, and he hated that he had become so codependent on someone who manipulated him and killed people close to him. Will had always struggled

with his identity, and he hated how his identity felt the most stable when he was *with* Hannibal.

He hated how tired he was, but most of all he hated how good Hannibal made him feel.

Will would not allow himself to give into what he so desperately craved. The nightmare only confirmed how bad it was, how much he needed to distance himself from Hannibal.

Will gathered himself together with a deep breath and slid into bed next to Buster. He closed his eyes, exhausted, and drifted back to sleep.

Will settled in Maine, because that was as far north as he could get away from Hannibal and still be in America. Will had a passport, but he didn't want a record of his whereabouts. At least, not any record that was easy to find.

He ended up finding a nicely-sized hunting cabin near Moosehead Lake. He found it online, during one of his sleepless nights at a roadside motel. An older couple was looking for someone to take care of it during the winter months, and Will jumped at the chance. It was just the solitary place he needed to shut himself away from the world, far away from Baltimore and everyone there.

If Will was honest with himself, it was an illusion of distance. Although he left his phone at the house at Wolf Trap, he still had a perfectly functioning laptop that would provide him with the website and phone number for the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane whenever he ached for it.

He hadn't given in to temptation yet, but neither had he removed it. The laptop was still sitting innocently on the kitchen table in the cabin, when Will knew he should bury it in the back of his closest.

The town of Rockwood at the north end of Moosehead Lake only had about 200 residents, so Will and his dogs were left alone most days with the snow and the trees. If Will had thought winters in Virginia were cold, he was sorely mistaken. Maine was the coldest place he'd ever been, and his southern roots had not prepared him for the bone-numbing cold that was Maine in the winter.

He managed. He spent a lot of his time outside, chopping firewood and fishing so that his body was forced to acclimate to the low temperature. His dogs didn't seem to be bothered by it, and spent their days romping around in the snow and chasing rabbits and foxes around the forest surrounding Will's isolated cabin.

A few months passed like that, with Will distracting himself from the yearning in his heart and the noise in his mind with hard work and the chilling cold. On good days, he gazed out over the snow-topped trees, pet his dogs, and enjoyed the beautiful escape he made for himself.

On bad days, nothing Will did helped to distract from the ache and he gave into browsing the BSHCI website. He was intimately aware that his attempts to move on were just an illusion and he was balancing on the edge of a knife, too close to tipping over and calling the number.

He hadn't called yet, but on one of those bad days he drove into town and bought a cheap burner cell phone. He didn't even have the energy to lie to himself and say that it served a purpose other than reaching Hannibal. He had no one else to call.

When the snow started to melt and the days got a little warmer, Will emailed the couple who owned the cabin and offered to rent it from them long-term. He had almost all the money he got from selling his house in Wolf Trap, plus a little more from selling extra fish he caught to the market in town. The couple was hesitant at first, but Will played on their young grandchildren and the man's health concerns to push them into agreeing.

"Take a year off from this place," Will said to them. "The forest gives off pollen that can be harmful with repeated exposure. Stay in Florida for now; let me take care of things up here."

Manipulation was effortless to him, and he could no longer blame Hannibal for his use of it.

After hanging up with them, another year's stay in the cabin finalized, Will reached for his bottle of whiskey and stared at the black plastic of the burner cell where it rested on the kitchen table.

He still had nightmares about getting to Hannibal, but now he also had dreams about Hannibal coming to him. He dreamed that he would walk outside his cabin one morning and find Hannibal standing in the snow, gazing at him with affection and pride.

"Wherever you go, I will follow," he'd say.

Will woke from those dreams with a dull ache in his chest and tears welling in his eyes. They weren't nightmares, no matter what Will tried to tell himself.

His thoughts of Hannibal trapped in the awful prison cell haunted him less as more time went by, as did the yearning to call the BSHCI. However, the night Will manipulated the older couple into letting him remain in the cabin, he finally gave into temptation.

He was out-of-his-mind drunk, and pained from the deep knowledge that Hannibal had changed him.

Hannibal was a force of nature, hard to resist when combined with Will's empathy, but Will had fought hard enough to separate his identity and personality from Hannibal's. They were no longer blurred together, and Will had no one to blame for his behavior except himself.

Unable to hold back anymore with his inhibitions lowered, Will grabbed the phone and punched in the number for the BSHCI that he had long since memorized.

It was late enough that Alana was probably at home, and Will would only have to wheedle his way past whatever guard was stationed on night shift. His breath came faster as the phone rang, then connected with a crackle.

“Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,” a tired voice recited. “This is Barney, how can I help you?”

All of a sudden, Will couldn’t breathe. His knuckles were white from where he clutched the phone to his ear, and his intoxicated mind spun from trying to come up with something to say.

“Hi,” he forced out. “Um, I’m a reporter for the newspaper. Can you… tell me how one of your prisoners is doing?”

As soon as the words slurred out of his mouth, Will wanted to slap himself. A reporter for “the newspaper”? Which newspaper?? He was beyond stupid, but his desperation to hear about Hannibal, to talk to him, pushed him past the point of caring.

Luckily, the orderly seemed tired enough to not notice the holes in Will’s story. “It depends, which one?”

“Hannibal Lecter,” Will breathed.

There was a slight pause, then the man — Barney — spoke suspiciously. “Dr. Lecter is our most dangerous high-profile prisoner. All the journalists for basically every newspaper in the country have already tried to get something out of him and failed miserably. I can’t give out any information about him. What did you say your name was, again?”

Will immediately flipped the phone shut and flung it across the room, where it landed on the kitchen countertop with a clack.

Will started laughing hysterically, because it was just so fitting that the phone he had just used to call Hannibal landed in the kitchen. His dogs startled at the noise, but Will couldn’t bring himself to care or to contain the frantic laughter that was spilling out of his mouth.

He had just called the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, intending to talk to Hannibal.

Thank god, he hadn't gotten that far. He started off asking about him, and was immediately flagged as suspicious. Honestly, Will was thankful for the orderly for not trusting him and asking for his name. That was the only warning that got through his drunk mind to perhaps not go through with his desperation.

Will didn't want to give his name. He didn't want Hannibal to know he missed him.

Suddenly, Will felt nauseous. The emotions inside him were swirling together with the whiskey, and he felt sick. He lurched out of his chair and rushed to the bathroom, making it just in time to throw up the meager contents of his stomach into the toilet.

After he finished heaving and pushed Winston away, who was sweetly trying to lick his face, Will groaned and flipped on his back to rest on the bathroom floor. His head was already throbbing, promising a wicked hangover.

Will closed his eyes and pressed his hands into the cool tile, resigning himself to an awful night imagining Hannibal's life at the BSHCI.

"Fuck," he whimpered, heaving a sob.

He curled into himself on the floor and stayed that way, wide awake, until the sun shined through the window and energized him enough to stumble into the kitchen for food and water.

After that incident, Will threw both his laptop and phone into the back of his closet and buried them underneath his winter clothes. Out of sight, out of mind. At least, that was the plan.

Months passed. Spring warmed into summer, and suddenly the one-year anniversary of Hannibal's sentencing hearing sprang up on Will out of nowhere. He had been doing his best to live without technology, but he still occasionally went into town and browsed the newspaper, which is how he became aware of the date.

An entire year had passed with Hannibal in prison. A year since Will had left him in Baltimore, existing, not truly living, in a cage. Will stared at the newspaper where it sat on the counter of the general store he frequented, and thought about how Hannibal was doing.

There was a jingle to announce the opening of the front door, which pulled Will out of his thoughts about Hannibal enough to rationally decide what he was going to do next. He could already feel himself in danger of spiraling into another miserable night, drunk on whiskey and digging into his closet to locate the forbidden phone.

He wanted to avoid that at all costs, so he decided to do something different, something he hadn't done before in the long months he'd lived in Rockwood, Maine.

Will went to a bar.

It was a small bar on the main street of town, one that Will had seen but never entered. He would rather sit in his cabin drinking whiskey surrounded by his dogs than frequent a bar full of strangers looking to be sociable.

But Will wouldn't go home now. His laptop and phone were there, full of temptation that Will would not allow himself to give into.

So he walked into the bar at 5 p.m. that evening, fully intending to eat and people-watch until he got too exhausted to think, returned to the cabin, and safely collapsed into bed. He needed a safe space to think about Hannibal, and this bar was the best he had.

Will sat down on the stool furthest from the door, the spot with the best view of the entire place, and ordered a ginger ale.

He wanted to order whiskey, but he knew from last time that combining alcohol with a head full of Hannibal was dangerous. Will was not about to get drunk and do something he regretted again, so he ordered ginger ale to try and settle his stomach. He felt nauseous when he thought about how Hannibal literally spent an entire year in prison, and was quite likely to stay there for a long time coming.

He knew, realistically, that Hannibal could escape from prison whenever he wanted to. Chiyoh was always at his disposal, but he could probably manage an escape by manipulating some orderly into helping him. The only thing keeping Hannibal behind bars was Will.

I want you to know exactly where I am, and where you can always find me.

The guilt was threatening to consume Will, flooding him from all sides. He felt guilty that he was the reason Hannibal was in prison, and he felt guilty about feeling that way. He wasn't *supposed* to ache for the cannibal serial killer that manipulated him, hurt him, and killed his friends.

But he did, God he did.

The guilt piled on Will, layers upon layers of it suffocating him until he felt like he couldn't breathe. Today that guilt came crashing back to the forefront of his mind, because he was forced to think about Hannibal spending an entire year in the BSHCI.

He would be so uncomfortable, in that dirty place without his fine luxuries and exquisite hobbies. And oh, the food. Will wanted to cry into his ginger ale when he thought about Hannibal having to eat the horrible, tasteless prison food. He deserved it, but the righteousness of the sentence did nothing to soothe Will's agony.

He didn't know how long he sat there, staring into his ginger ale feeling disgusting, until someone slid into the stool next to him.

Will looked up and saw that it was a woman, moderately pretty with big eyes and hair framed around her sweet face. His eyes darted around to see if she was with anyone, confused that she would purposefully seek him out as a conversation partner. Out of everyone in this bar, he was the least social.

"It's not everyday you see a sad looking man in a bar drinking ginger ale, of all things," she said, friendly. "I bet there's an interesting story there."

Will huffed a laugh, swirling his ginger ale in his glass. "More like a horror film."

The woman smiled. "If you say so. I won't pry if you don't want to talk about it. Lord knows I've got things in my life I'd do anything to forget." She paused for a second, thoughtful. "Or then again, maybe I wouldn't."

Will made eye contact with her then, impressed at his luck in finding a kindred spirit. He liked that she didn't push him to talk, and instead knew exactly what to say to fill the silence in a way that wasn't insufferable.

"I'm Will Graham," he offered.

She smiled wider and held out a hand. "Molly Foster."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be a mix of Hannibal and Will POV :)

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> “It took a few months of hard work, but I got everything you asked for, Dr. Lecter,” Barney said as he put the day’s breakfast through the dropbox.

Chapter Notes

> This chapter checks in with both Hannibal and Will. Prepare for a lot of pining, on both sides <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After Hannibal made the deal with Barney to obtain information about Will, he prepared himself for a reasonable waiting period. Barney was a beginner at digging up information, and Hannibal was a patient man.

He spent the first week focusing on his fan mail, reading the songs written to him by numerous lonely hearts and admirers. The large supply of praise was enjoyable, and Hannibal spent more effort than usual crafting responses to each one of them.

After he caught up on his backlog of fan mail, Hannibal increased his daily workout routine. He was doing 20 minutes of exercise every morning and every night in his cell, but he upped it to 40 minutes twice daily in order to compensate for the time he previously spent drawing.

Alana noticed his break from sketching, and brought it up during one of their visits she stubbornly insisted on calling “therapy sessions”, although both she and Hannibal knew that their interactions were comically far from therapeutic.

“Do you need more paper?” Alana questioned. “Or pencils, perhaps?”

Hannibal only smiled, standing in the middle of his cage with his hands held behind his back.

"No, thank you, Alana," Hannibal answered. "I've decided to pause my artistic activities for the time being."

Alana raised an eyebrow. "Curious, but acceptable."

Hannibal stepped closer to the glass.

"I'm curious," he mused, "if your morning sickness has stopped, now that you're entering the second trimester."

Alana's hand went to her slightly swollen belly.

"Curiosity killed the cat, Hannibal," she warned.

He had a habit of pushing her personal buttons, just hard enough to keep her on her toes. It was entertaining, and she hadn't punished him for it yet.

"Yes, but satisfaction brought it back," he smiled.

Alana crossed her arms and gave him a pointed look. "You're sure you don't want any art supplies? It must be terribly boring in there. I could even get you paint, if you'd like."

Hannibal's smile grew and he took another step forward.

“As I said, I have grown weary of the arts for now,” he tilted his head to the side. “However, if I could request some more books.”

Alana sighed, their verbal sparring over for today in favor of bargaining. “Yes, alright. Do you want more Homer?”

“Not quite,” Hannibal replied airily. “I would like some books on the Spanish language.”

Both of Alana’s eyebrows went up. “You want to learn Spanish?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said simply. “I am fluent in four languages, Alana, but I’m afraid Spanish is not one of them. I would like to bring the count up to five.”

Alana just sighed again, and the next day Hannibal was given a stack of books, the top one being *Spanish for Dummies*. Hannibal’s lip quirked at Alana’s attempt at being passive aggressive.

He spent the next month devouring the language books and teaching himself Spanish.

If Will finally accepted himself and decided to run away together, Hannibal wanted to be fully prepared for wherever they would settle down. He spent quite a lot of time imagining such a future in certain rooms in his mind palace, of seeing Will in a place where the sun would shine brightly on his face and illuminate his beautiful features.

His memory palace was the only place where he could somewhat recreate Will’s visage, and vividly remember his rare smile.

He suspected Will would want to stay away from Europe, both because of their past there and how predictable it would be to law enforcement. They could go to Asia, or Africa, or South America instead. Hannibal was partial to South America; he had never been before and it would feel like a fresh start for him and Will.

Thus, he taught himself Spanish in the confines of his cage, patiently waiting for either information about Will or Will himself, whichever came first.

A few of the orderlies spoke Spanish, enough for Hannibal to practice on them and correct himself if they giggled at his mistakes. With their assistance, Hannibal became moderately fluent. He had always been gifted in languages, and was pleased to discover that he could learn a completely foreign one in a couple months when he had nothing else to occupy his time.

Barney came and went from Hannibal's cell regularly, but he never indicated anything that would imply his acquisition of the information Hannibal had requested.

So Hannibal continued to wait alone, fighting off negative thoughts of Will's rejection and abandonment with stubborn optimism.

And one day, Hannibal's optimism paid off.

"It took a few months of hard work, but I got everything you asked for, Dr. Lecter," Barney said as he put the day's breakfast through the dropbox.

Hannibal took the tray leisurely, a small smile gracing his features the only indication of his excitement at hearing of Barney's success. If he walked back to the metal table a tad faster than normal, then Barney made no comment of it.

"Thank you, Barney. What news do you have for me?" Hannibal inquired, dipping his plastic spoon into the abysmal yogurt provided for him.

This was the first instance in over a year of mandated incarceration that Hannibal was going to hear about Will, and his heart was beating with anticipation. Would Will still be in Wolf Trap, with his pack of dogs? Would he have moved somewhere far away from Baltimore, seeking physical distance from Hannibal and hope it brought emotional distance? Would Will have gotten a job, perhaps as a boat mechanic?

Hannibal didn't know because he could never predict Will's actions, thus he was eager to hear what Barney was about to share. Like all of his emotions, however, Hannibal hid his excitement deep inside his chest, allowing it to flutter inside like a butterfly trapped behind glass.

"I started at his house in Wolf Trap, but he sold it literally the day after your trial was over and left town. He didn't tell anyone where he was going, and not even Dr. Bloom or Agent Crawford know where he is," Barney started.

Hannibal tilted his head. "And how did you come to that conclusion?"

Barney looked away. "I overheard Dr. Bloom talking on the phone a few days after you said you wanted to know about Will Graham."

Hannibal's smile widened. "Ah, I see. Please, continue."

Barney's willingness to eavesdrop to garner information was a quality that Hannibal valued, and one that he was sure could be built upon to include other furtive acts. Hannibal filed the promise of more covert operations away for later.

Right now, he could only focus on the information about Will.

"I was stuck for a few weeks, not really sure how I was going to find out where he was. Tattlecrime has nothing on him, and since Agent Crawford can't find him with his government resources, then that means he's either off grid or using a different name."

Hannibal was impressed at the logical reasoning Barney exhibited, and nodded at him to resume his narrative.

“But suddenly one day, I remembered something strange that happened during one of the times I worked the night shift,” Barney divulged, leaning forward in his chair. “Someone, a man, called and asked for you. He claimed to be a reporter, but it was abnormal because he called in the middle of the night. He also hung up when I asked who he worked for.”

Hannibal lowered his spoon. “And you thought this man was Will Graham?”

Barney shrugged. ”I didn’t know for sure, but it was the only lead I had.”

Hannibal took another bite of yogurt to hide the smirk that was growing on his face. Of course it was Will, giving in to the bond connecting them.

“He asked for information about you, any kind, and...” Barney hesitated. “He sounded drunk.”

Hannibal sighed. “Yes, Will was always prone to whiskey.”

His mind briefly wandered to the top-grade whiskey he stocked in the apartment in Florence, but he forcefully shut that door in his memory palace before it could do any further damage.

“Well, I thought it might’ve been him so I went back and checked the phone records to get the number. I googled it and it turned out to be a burner phone, but the area code was for Maine. The *entire state* of Maine.”

Hannibal chuckled. “So he is somewhere in Maine. Thank you, Barney. I am impressed at your detective work.”

Barney ducked his head to hide a small smile. “Thank you, Dr. Lecter, but I wouldn’t have come to you if I only knew a general area. Besides, you wanted a photograph too.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows, breakfast now completely disregarded. “You know more?”

“I do,” Barney nodded. “I’ve never met Will Graham, but from what I’ve heard he’s a solitary guy, likes to stay away from people. I figured he’d stay away from the major cities and suburbs, and he likes fishing, so he’d probably be staying near a lake or a river or something similar.”

“Yes, probably,” Hannibal agreed. In reality, Will could have settled in a major city just to throw off anyone trying to find him, but Hannibal would have only checked the urban options after he had exhausted the rural ones.

“So I started calling the local general stores around lakes and rivers. That’s the part that took me so long, I was probably on the phone every day with a new store clerk. I asked for him by name, but always double-checked by describing him in case he was using an alias,” Barney explained.

“Barney, if you ever desire a career change I believe that the FBI could use a man like you,” Hannibal remarked, impressed.

Barney blushed again. “Thank you, doctor. After many weeks of doing that, I finally lucked out. I got a hold of someone who knew Will Graham, said he came into the store every so often for supplies. He wasn’t using a different name, and he’s got all his dogs with him.”

Hannibal smiled fondly. He was glad that Will kept his dogs, he knew how attached he was to them.

I miss my dogs. I’m not going to miss you.

Hannibal hoped that the opposite was true, now. It certainly seemed that way, judging from Will’s drunken call to the BSHCI asking about him.

Hannibal exhaled imperceptibly, letting go all the tension he felt since the day he realized that maybe Will did not miss him, and wasn’t going to visit him. The day when Hannibal’s memory proved limited, and he couldn’t perfectly recall the exact lines on Will’s face.

“I trust you brought a picture,” Hannibal directed politely.

Barney nodded. “I’ll slip it to you when you finish your breakfast.”

It was an honest response, but also a subtle manipulation tactic intended to nudge Hannibal into eating his food. He’d been eating less while incarcerated, only ingesting enough of the dreadful excuses for “food” as necessary to keep his body strong and energized. Hannibal knew himself well, and had no trouble calculating the exact amounts of nourishment he needed in order to maintain his body.

Alana did not seem aware of his intentions and only noticed that Hannibal was eating less food than provided, thus instructing the staff to push him into eating more for fear that he was starving himself out of spite or simple fastidiousness.

It was amusing, and a sure way to manipulate Alana into giving him access to the prison kitchen. Hannibal may eat the grim food provided for him so as to stay healthy, but he would much rather prefer his own cooking.

Hannibal finished his breakfast dutifully, leaving only the watery oatmeal untouched. Barney walked up to the dropbox as Hannibal deposited his tray, adjusting his body to block the camera and slipping a small picture into the box as he retrieved the tray.

With Alana’s line of sight fully blocked, Hannibal reached for the photo and allowed himself a single moment to feast his eyes upon it before slipping it into his sleeve.

That single glance was all it took for Hannibal’s breath to hitch, and the butterfly to start flinging itself against his chest again. It was of Will, wearing an awful flannel-patterned shirt, smiling just barely as he threw a stick for his pack to chase. His face was clearly visible, and Hannibal closed his eyes briefly to savor its beauty.

“This is a recent photograph,” Hannibal said as he walked slowly back to the table. “The scar on his forehead appears fully healed.”

He was glad when he sat in his cold chair, for he was unsure if he could have remained standing a moment longer.

"It is," Barney confirmed. "Didn't you notice that I was gone this past weekend? I drove up to Maine and found that general store fella that saw him. He was very friendly and told me exactly where he was staying, in a little cabin by the lake."

Hannibal noticed that Barney was not giving him the names of the town or the lake; a thinly-veiled attempt to keep the most identifying information from Hannibal for fear of what he would do with it. Hannibal was displeased by the withholding for a moment, before he told himself that he could always needle the information out of Barney later.

As it was, he was incredibly grateful for the new picture and the information Barney had pain-stakingly collected for him.

But it seemed as if Barney hadn't finished relaying all the details yet.

"It's a nice cabin, Dr. Lecter. In the middle of the woods, far enough from the water's edge that flooding isn't an issue and he can walk to his favorite fishing spots anytime he wants." Barney hesitated briefly. "While I was watching, just after I snapped the picture, I saw something else."

"Oh?" Hannibal asked.

Barney hesitated again. "I saw a woman. Long brown hair, with bangs. She brought him a drink, and… kissed him. I think it's his girlfriend."

Hannibal took a deep breath. Then another.

"I trust you asked that friendly store clerk about what you saw?" he asked lightly.

“Barney swallowed. “Yes, doctor. Her name is Molly, and she’s got a son, about 10 years old. She’s been dating Will for about three months.”

Hannibal did the math quickly. Three months ago was the one-year anniversary of his mandated incarceration.

Just like that, the roaring fire of Hannibal’s anger and jealousy were reduced down to simmering flames. The timing could not be a coincidence. Will was using this woman as a crutch to help him move past Hannibal.

Hannibal smiled. Will was never able to do that before, and although a part of Hannibal was afraid that this time he would succeed, he ignored that part and focused on the more optimistic option that Will would fail utterly, break up with this woman, and give in to come visit Hannibal.

Barney looked slightly fearful of Hannibal’s sudden smile, as if he did not expect that reaction. “That’s all I’ve got, Dr. Lecter.”

“Yes, thank you Barney,” Hannibal said absently as he retrieved his drawing pencils and some paper from the desk in the corner, where they had sat untouched for the past few months. “That will be all.”

Barney swallowed and hurried away, leaving Hannibal in blissful isolation to sketch multiple copies of the small smile and raised scar gracing Will’s handsome face.

Will had been dating Molly for three months, and it was going surprisingly well.

She respected his space and didn’t seem to mind his strangeness. She was considerate, accepting Will for who he was and not pushing him for more.

At least, she accepted the parts of Will that he showed her. She didn't know about the other parts that existed but were hidden, locked away inside Will, because he didn't want to face them or his memories of the person that had nurtured them. Molly only knew what was safe for her to know, and Will was determined to keep it that way.

He didn't expect her to like even those small glimpses of himself. Will realized that he was quiet, antisocial, and too blunt for most people to handle. He had been very scared and insecure until recently, having only fleeting relationships with women after they showed the first interest. After Hannibal, Will recognized that he had become more confident and he rarely felt afraid, but he was still distant in relationships.

Well, any relationship except the mess of the one he had with Hannibal. That felt like anything but distant, even now with all the time and physical distance between them.

Hannibal invaded his thoughts when awake, and his dreams when asleep.

Molly didn't seem to mind Will's abnormal emotional distancing, however. As she said in their first meeting, they both had things in their past that still held power. She didn't pry, and neither did Will. It was one of the reasons they were working out so well.

Another was that Molly was funny. She was brash and always knew what witty comment to say to make Will laugh, something he hadn't done in recent memory. He liked her company, and for some reason she seemed to like his.

She had told him about her son when they first started dating, and Will didn't view it as an issue. Molly was a good person, and she was sure to be a good mother. Will didn't think it mattered anyway; he was sure Molly would dump him before their relationship got too serious. That's how it always went.

Until one day, when Molly said she wanted her son to meet Will.

"Wally's a good boy," she had said. "He just needs a father figure, someone to take him fishing, you know?"

Will remembered blinking stupidly. “I can fish.”

Thus Will was going to be introduced to Molly’s son. Today.

He hadn’t prepared well. Molly had proposed a week and Will had agreed, and then spent the entire week holed up in his cabin drinking whiskey and staring into the trees in front of his porch. He was dating a woman, and she wanted him to be a father figure to her son.

Will had not had good experiences when it came to children.

The first was Abigail. Will had only known her for about a year but in that time he formed an intense connection to her, both because of the empathy he had for her real father and the guilt and responsibility he felt from taking her real parents away from her. She also had a strong personality that Will instantly clicked with, similar to how he instantly clicked with Hannibal. There was something similar in all three of them, Abigail less so than her two pseudo-fathers, but still. They were a family, for a time.

Then Hannibal took Abigail away, gaslighting Will into believing that she was dead. And when he found out that she actually wasn’t, Hannibal killed her a second time moments later, right in front of him. Indefinitely this time.

On top of all that, the only time Will was likely to produce actual offspring, courtesy of Margot Verger’s deception, Hannibal took that child away from him as well.

Will always thought he’d be a good father, if given the chance. But now, he’d been so traumatized by losing that potential child, by losing Abigail, that Will didn’t know if he could mentally handle going through it again.

He didn’t think he’d be a good father figure to Wally. He was too fixated on overcoming his own monsters to help a child overcome theirs.

So Will sat on his porch for a week leading up to the inevitably awful meeting, drank whiskey, and thought about Hannibal.

He made sure the whiskey was put away in the highest kitchen cabinet, out of sight, when Molly and Walter drove up to his small cabin. They'd agreed to have the meeting here, close to the lake, so that Will could take Wally fishing. Will was relieved when Molly suggested the activity earlier, because it was something Will could teach easily. It was also an activity where not talking was preferred, so that you didn't scare the fish.

At least, that's the excuse Will could hide behind.

Will let his dogs out when Molly and her son got out of the car, the onslaught of friendly, furry animals a delightful thing for a kid. Or at least, Will hoped. He never got the chance to show Abigail his dogs.

"Woah!" Wally cried as his pack almost knocked him over with their enthusiasm.

"I told you there's a lot of dogs," Molly smiled.

Will took a deep breath and walked down from the porch towards them. He felt silly for being afraid of a child when he wasn't afraid of killers, and tried not to think about how that was purely Hannibal's doing.

"That means they like you a lot," Will offered, trying for a smile and hoping it didn't come off as a grimace. Kids liked adults who smiled, it made them less scary. Will wanted to do his best to not look like the monster he kept hidden inside.

Molly smiled at him and gave him a kiss on the cheek, which Will returned, and reached out a hand to withdraw her son from the swarm of excited animals.

"Wally," she said gently, "this is Will. He's a really nice, sweet man."

Will knew that he wasn't, but he tried his best to act like the man Molly thought he was and crouched down a bit to get on Wally's level. He purposefully made eye contact and softened his face, making himself look friendly and less threatening. He was sure that Molly had prepped her son for this meeting, telling him all about their relationship, and Will wanted to do his part to make a good first impression.

"Hey bud," he greeted with another awkward smile. "I'm Will. It's nice to meet you."

Wally looked at him, then nodded. "I'm Walter, but my mom calls me Wally. I guess you can too. Nice to meet you."

Will exhaled in relief and his small smile turned real. The kid didn't seem afraid of him, instead looking more curious. It was probably the only good difference between him and Abigail.

Will swallowed the lump in his throat at the thought of Abigail and straightened up, gesturing towards his cabin. "You want to try fishing?"

Wally's eyes zeroed in on the rods set out on the porch and he nodded again. "Yeah, I wanna catch one."

Will chuckled. "I'm sure between the two of us, we can catch one. Maybe even two."

Wally smiled then. "Great! Let's go."

Molly smiled widely at Will and nodded encouragingly. "You two boys go ahead, I'm going to make some lemonade and snuggle with the doggies."

The three of them headed towards Will's cabin and Molly kissed the top of Walter's head before she headed inside. "Good luck! Don't fall in the water!"

Wally rolled his eyes. “Mom, I’ll be fine.”

Will smiled at his attitude and Molly laughed. “Whatever you say! Have fun!”

Wally went straight to the fishing poles after his mom herded all the dogs inside. “Which one’s mine?”

Will touched the smallest one, a kids’ rod he had gotten just for this occasion at the sporting goods store in town. “I think this one’s your size.”

Wally grabbed it and immediately tried to swing it around, causing a laugh to erupt from Will’s chest. “Woah, take it easy there. We have to get to the lake first, then we can fish.”

He picked up his own fishing pole, grabbed the tackle box, and guided Wally down the path that led from his cabin to the water’s edge. He had to instruct the kid to hold the fishing pole up as he walked, to make sure the end wouldn’t scrape the ground. Molly had told him that her husband had died of cancer, but Will wondered how long ago that was. He wondered if Wally’s dad had ever taken him fishing before, or if he had been sick by the time Wally was old enough.

Will didn’t know and he definitely wasn’t going to ask, so he treated Wally as a beginner and taught him how to cast the line, watch the bobber, and reel it in once it disappeared under the water. Usually Will only did fly-fishing, not bait fishing, but fly-fishing would be too hard for a kid to do effectively. He’d never actually got the chance to teach Abigail how to do it.

He made sure to bait Wally’s hook for safety, but allowed him to look through the tackle box for the bait he wanted. Will smiled when he chose the biggest, most ostentatious neon rubber worm. It was exactly what he expected a child to choose.

After both Will and Wally had their lines baited and casted out into the lake, Will closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to harness the peace he felt from fishing in order to combat the anxiety he felt from attempting to bond with Molly’s son.

Would you be a good father, Will?

Will took another deep breath and opened his eyes, staring at the water. He could've been a good father once, until Hannibal took that path from him. Twice.

He ached with grief, grief that he thought he'd worked past. He'd forgiven Hannibal for Abigail's death, but standing here, fishing with another child, brought back all the pain associated with the loss of one.

Will didn't know if he could step into the father role again. He didn't know if that would be fair to Wally, since Will could never be the father he deserved. But as he gazed out onto the calm lake and took in the reality of his new life, he thought that it might help him move on.

And moving on was the best thing Will could do to spite Hannibal.

With that thought in mind, he cleared his throat. "So, how old are you?"

"I'm nine. Almost ten," Wally responded. "My birthday's in a few months."

Will raised his eyebrows. "Wow, almost double-digits. That's a big milestone."

"I'm excited," Wally agreed, reeling in his rod to make another cast. "Mom's letting me start baseball when I turn ten."

"She wouldn't let you before?" Will asked, hoping that he wasn't prying. The last thing he wanted was the kid to get defensive over Molly.

"No," Wally complained. "She said it was too dangerous."

“Ah,” Will nodded. “Well, at least you can start in a few months.”

“Yeah,” Wally said.

Will swallowed again. “If you want, maybe I could —”

Suddenly, Wally gasped and clutched onto his pole as the bobber dunked under the water and the line went taut. “I’ve got a fish!”

“Yes, you do!” Will urged, holding out a hand to grip onto Wally’s reel and making sure he didn’t lose it from the strength of the fish. “Reel it back in, there you go.”

Wally turned his reel as fast as he could, and soon enough a little fish broke out of the water and dangled on the end of the line. Will encouraged him to keep reeling until he got rid of all the slack and the fish was hanging a few inches from the end of the pole.

“What is it?” Wally asked, a big smile on his face.

Will smiled back as he unhooked the bait from the fish’s mouth and put it on the stringer to keep it alive until Will could prepare it at his cabin. “It’s a little trout. Sure to be tasty.”

Wally’s mouth opened in a silent “Wow”. “It’s so slimy!”

Will chuckled. “Yes, it is.”

“Do you usually catch trout?” Wally wondered. “Is it the best fish to catch?”

Will's lips twitched. "It's a good one. I'm used to a type of trout in Virginia, Brook Trout. This one's a Lake Trout."

"Cool," Wally smiled. "I want to catch another one."

Will re-baited his hook and the two of them stayed out there for another hour, in which time Wally got more talkative and Will caught their second trout. The lake was fully stocked and Will always had luck fishing there, which was one of the reasons why he liked living at Moosehead Lake so much. Another reason, of course, being that it was so far away from Baltimore.

As Will cast out his line and idly listened to Wally chat about his favorite baseball teams, he realized that he'd never taken Hannibal fishing. It felt like he had, since he'd routinely think about Hannibal while doing so, but he hadn't. Will had never found out if Hannibal was a natural at it, or if he would need Will's help to bait the hook and cast the line correctly. He never saw Hannibal rummage through his tackle box and choose his favorite bait, never saw him wrinkle his nose at the rubbery smell. Knowing Hannibal, he'd probably insist on using live bait and buy his own pretentious fishing pole.

Will never got that experience, but he found that he wanted it. He craved it.

But like all of his cravings for Hannibal, he shoved them down deep inside and pretended they weren't there.

They returned to the cabin when Wally started getting antsy about cooking his fish for lunch, and Molly showered them in praises as the dogs barked their congratulations.

"Such a good little fisherman!" she cooed at Wally, then winked at Will. "And such a good teacher!"

Will gave her a half-smile and left mother and son on the couch while he gutted and cooked the fish. When they sat down to eat the modest meal of lemon-seasoned fish and vegetables, Wally was so pleased with the final product.

“This is so good!” he beamed.

“Delicious!” Molly echoed, eyes twinkling.

Will just reassured them that it was all Wally’s doing for catching such a good first fish, bringing luck to Will catching his and cooking them well. After lunch Molly and Walter went outside to walk the dogs while Will cleaned up, and caught his breath.

The day was going well, to his surprise. Wally seemed to like him, and Molly was absolutely shining with happiness. Will could tell that she wanted Will to be a full-time father figure for Wally, and hoped they would get married. The pressure of her desire was suffocating, but it offered a fresh start, of sorts.

Will wondered if a pre-made family would take away his yearning for Hannibal. He was scared to find out.

After Will finished the dishes, Molly and Walter came back inside, the kid yawning.

“He’s exhausted,” Molly explained. “Can he take a nap?”

“Of course,” Will answered. “He can sleep in the guest bed.”

Wally smiled sleepily at Will as Molly walked him to the spare bedroom, and Will smiled back. Then, he poured himself a couple fingers of whiskey and settled onto the couch.

“No ginger ale this time?” Molly joked as she joined Will on the couch.

Will attempted a smile. “Not for stress-relief.”

“You did a great job with him, I know how stressful socializing can be for you,” Molly said gently as she cuddled into Will’s side.

Will put an arm around her shoulders and sighed. “Yeah.”

Molly laced their fingers together. “So, you’re from Virginia?”

Will stiffened. Did she know about his past? Did she see something on TV, or the paper?

“Wally mentioned that you said you were used to catching fish from Virginia,” she explained.

Will relaxed. “Yeah, I lived there for a while before this. Before that, I lived in New Orleans.”

Molly squeezed his hand. “Will, I don’t want to pry, but… why are you all the way up here? When you’re from down south? Usually people move south for the warmth, not north for the cold.”

Will chewed his lip. Molly had told him about her past with her husband, and how she and Walter had relocated to start a new life. He hadn’t told her anything about his past, and he knew it was unfair. He still didn’t want to, but he had the opportunity to control the information she received. If he didn’t tell her, she would inevitably get curious and google him, which would be disastrous.

“I used to work for the FBI,” he started after a long silence. “I was a teacher at the academy, but I consulted as a profiler on some of the harder cases.” He sighed deeply. “I have an empathy disorder, meaning that I can empathize with almost anyone. The FBI gave me evidence to look at, and I interpreted it by empathizing with the… perpetrators.”

“Wow, that’s cool,” Molly replied. Will held back a scoff. “Cool” was the last word he’d use.

“What happened, Will?” she asked softly.

Will closed his eyes. “Have you heard of Hannibal Lecter?”

Molly paused. “I think so. Wasn’t he that serial killer that was on the news a year or so ago? The cannibal?”

“Yeah,” Will forced out. “Well, he was my psychiatrist.”

Molly gasped and sat up quickly, causing Will’s arm to fall to his side. She looked at him directly with wide eyes. “Will, what?”

“Yup,” he muttered, looking away. “I went to him for help to deal with all the violence I saw at the FBI. Little did I know that the very guy I was trying to catch was in front of me the entire time.”

Molly was quiet for a moment before she reached out and held a hand to his cheek. Will closed his eyes again, remembering the last time someone held him that way. It had been Hannibal.

“Oh, Will,” Molly said sadly. “Is that why you were in the bar the first time we met? You were ashamed of not catching him sooner?”

Will took a deep breath. That wasn’t the reason at all, but he wasn’t going to correct her.

“Yeah,” he lied. “I was ashamed because my empathy should have clocked him the moment I met him.”

“But you realized eventually?” Molly replied encouragingly.

“Yes,” Will sighed. He didn’t want to tell her that he was in prison for serial murder when he realized that, or that he warned Hannibal the police were coming for him when he should have been on the police’s side. He certainly wasn’t going to tell her that he sailed all the way to Italy for Hannibal, and it wasn’t to apprehend him.

“He came to my house and surrendered,” Will settled on.

“Wow,” Molly breathed. “He knew the jig was up. I’m glad he didn’t decide to kill you instead.”

Will barked out a laugh. “Yeah.”

Except Hannibal had decided to kill him in Florence, but when he got the chance again… he didn’t. Will did not want to go back down that rabbit hole of complicated emotion.

“Well, he’s where he’s supposed to be now,” Molly said, cuddling up against Will again and petting his hand. “What a horrible man.”

“Yeah,” Will repeated. “Horrible.”

As Molly drifted off into a nap, her fatigue pulling Will towards sleep as well, he thought about how Hannibal definitely wasn’t supposed to be in prison right now, and was only there because he thought Will didn’t care about him. He thought about how “horrible” wasn’t a word he’d use to describe Hannibal, unless it was combined with “beautiful”.

Will’s last thought before fading away into unconsciousness was the hope that he would see Hannibal’s smile in his dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos much appreciated <3

I'm thinking two chapters left, until the start of the Red Dragon arc!

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> “Tell me,” he commanded sharply, stepping closer to the glass.
>
> Barney took a frightened step back at his approach, but opened his mouth to utter an earth-shaking revelation.
>
> “Will Graham is getting married.”

Chapter Notes

> The wedding!!!! We'll see both Hannibal and Will's points of views here, prepare for lots of angst and pining. But after this chapter, one more left before the Red Dragon arc!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal elegantly taped his latest design to the wall, above the writing desk Alana had so kindly provided for him to hold all his sketches. Usually he would fold the drawing into a book, or simply drop the finished sketch onto the desk or into its drawer, but this one was special.

This one was of Will.

It wasn’t the first drawing Hannibal had done of him since Barney had procured a photograph, but in Hannibal’s opinion it was the best one. With the picture as a reference, he had spent hours recreating the lines around Will’s eyes, the curve of his mouth, and the bounce of his curls. Once he mastered all the magnificent parts of Will again, Hannibal combined them to produce, finally, an accurate depiction of his beloved’s profile.

Hannibal smiled when he did so, relieved that his talent had not withered away during his incarceration. He could still capture Will’s beauty.

The portrait Hannibal had just hung up on the wall of his cell was not a mere copy of the picture Barney had given him, however. Hannibal had used that one to supplement his memory of the Will he had sketched.

In the drawing, Will's face was angled slightly sideways, towards Hannibal. His hair curled on the left side of his face, the part facing away from Hannibal, leaving the entire right side of his face, and the fresh wounds upon it, completely exposed.

Will was smiling at him, eyes twinkling, the combination of his bruises and happy expression making him seem ethereal, like an angel wounded in a cosmic battle.

Will had rarely smiled at Hannibal, and he remembered just how breathtaking the sight was at the time, after eight long months apart.

If I saw you every day, forever, Will, I would remember this time.

It was perhaps one of Hannibal's strongest memories, and he was glad he was able to faithfully recreate it.

As he stepped back from the wall, drawing now secured by the tape he still held, Hannibal smiled. It was almost like Will was in the cage with him, summoned from Hannibal's memory palace and deposited straight beside him behind the glass.

Hannibal only moved his gaze away from the portrait of Will at the sound of the doors to his private cage swinging open, revealing Barney. His appearance was somewhat unexpected, since it was not mealtime and Hannibal was not expecting a call from his lawyer. Indeed, Barney looked rather shaken as he stiffly walked up to the glass.

Hannibal tilted his head in curiosity. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

Barney swallowed, then took a deep breath and stood up straight. “There is news, Dr. Lecter. We only just found out, and Dr. Bloom told us not to tell you, but I didn’t want to lie to you.”

Hannibal’s interest was piqued. The news could only be related to Will, if Alana did not want him knowing about it. “What has happened?”

Barney hesitated, chewing his lip as the silence stretched on.

Hannibal was growing frustrated but he was also concerned. He hoped nothing fatal had happened to Will, that would be… No, that would be unthinkable. If Will was dead, Hannibal would know it.

“Tell me,” he commanded sharply, stepping closer to the glass.

Barney took a frightened step back at his approach, but opened his mouth to utter an earth-shaking revelation.

“Will Graham is getting married.”

Hannibal crushed the roll of tape in his hands.

Shock came first, a ripple of complete surprise that fractured Hannibal’s firm foundation. The news was wholly unexpected, and once Hannibal wrapped his mind around it — around Will *getting married*, to someone other than *him* — the anger set in.

Blind, white-hot anger; the type of fury that was only brought on by betrayal. By marrying someone else, Will was effectively cutting ties with Hannibal for good, severing their connection in the most straightforward way. It was akin to a slap in the face, but Hannibal would have welcomed a slap much more.

He curled his lip in a snarl and locked eyes with Barney, his seething gaze meeting the orderly's terrified one.

"How did you come about this information?" Hannibal asked slowly, trying to control his emotions.

Barney took another step back. "T-There was an announcement in the local newspaper. Dr. Bloom found out because Agent Crawford was keeping tabs on W- Mr. Graham's online activity."

Hannibal heaved a deep breath and turned away, silently giving Barney permission to escape. He did with hurried steps and a forceful swing of the door, then Hannibal was left alone to stew in his cage.

The cage that he was waiting in, patiently and obediently, like a common pet. All for Will Graham.

But Will wasn't going to visit him anytime soon. He was *exchanging rings* with a woman he had only known for six months, by Hannibal's count.

Hannibal's ire was drawn back to the drawing of Will he had just completed and displayed, the one where he was smiling in front of *la Primavera.*

At that time, he and Will had not seen each other for many months. Hannibal had been angry with him for his betrayal back in Baltimore, but he had forgiven him and ached for him those long months they were apart. Their reunion had been powerful, and it was one of the best moments of Hannibal's life.

The fury he was experiencing now melded with his feelings from that day, until a single thought grew in Hannibal's mind, gaining strength and solidifying the longer he stared at Will's beautifully injured face.

He is mine, Hannibal resolved savagely. *He is mine, and he will be mine, every day and forever.*

There was nothing Will could possibly do to change that.

Hannibal simply had to remind him of the fact. Will was *his*, and if anyone else dared to lay claim to his beloved?

Hannibal would happily punish them for their trespasses.

"Molly," Hannibal said aloud, testing the taste of her on his tongue. "It is rude to take that which does not belong to you."

Will stared at himself in the mirror and tried to smile with happiness that he didn't feel.

His expression came out like a grimace more than a smile, like it usually did, and Will sighed.

It shouldn't be this hard for him to smile. It was his wedding day, for Christ's sake, he was supposed to be happy. It was supposed to be the happiest day of his life.

But it just felt like any other Sunday. Bland and boring.

Where Will lacked in happiness, he was drowning in guilt. Molly was a good woman and an amazing mother, and she deserved a husband that would treat her right and be a good step-father to Walter. Guilt swirled inside Will since he knew, deep down, he couldn't be that. He was too focused on taking care of himself to take care of a wife and a son the way they deserved.

Will was trying his best in his relationship with Molly and her son. His budding relationship with them was overriding his past relationships that had hurt him so deeply; or at least, that's what he told himself. He remembered his neuropsychology classes from graduate school, and how the brain's pathways get rewritten with new, related experiences. The best way to overcome old habits was to form new ones, and the same was true for relationships. The best way he could move on from stagnating on his bond with Hannibal was to create new, healthy connections.

Will was testing out that theory with Molly and Walter. He could make it through an entire day with them, if he had a day before to prepare and a day after to decompress. However, his schedule was about to be thrown completely off-balance. He was getting married, and later this week he was supposed to permanently move into Molly's cabin and live together as a family. With their space melded together, Will wouldn't have the luxury of needed alone time.

Although he was grateful for his new connections with Molly and Walter, he was slightly regretting how fast they were moving.

But then again, if Will went at his own pace, then it would be years before he felt comfortable enough to marry Molly. If at all. There was a nagging voice in the back of his mind pushing him to jump headfirst into it, a voice that sounded eerily similar to Molly's.

Will knew his empathy had a habit of confusing his desires with others', and was self-aware enough to know that it was likely happening again. But he was also smart enough to see the positive of rushing into this marriage: exposure therapy.

The best way for his neural networks to get rewritten was to activate them continuously. If all his time was spent focused on being a husband and a father, there would be no spare time to focus on himself, or Hannibal.

Will was trying to tell himself that, even if a larger part of him rebelled against the idea. He was trying to be a better man than he was.

Molly could tell he was trying, and that's all she seemed to care about. Will was trying, he was trying so hard to be the man she and Wally deserved, but the fact remained that, as of right now, he wasn't good enough for them. He was pretending to be something he wasn't, and the guilt over his deception was threatening to suffocate him.

His mind was screaming at him to call the wedding off, but Will fought to ignore it. He had only taken the jump and proposed because it was obvious Molly wanted him to, and Will didn't want to lose the only good thing in his life. He knew it was selfish and dishonest, but it didn't really matter because he wasn't a good person anyway, deep down inside.

Will wasn't the man Molly thought he was. She had no idea about the things he had been through, the things he had *done.* She only knew the parts of Will that he showed her, the parts that he wanted to focus on. She didn't know all the parts of Will. Not like Hannibal did.

Molly could see that he was trying to be a good partner and father figure, but she couldn't see just how hard Will had to work to do so, how *easy* it would be for him to turn his back on them both and run to what he really wanted.

She didn't know anything.

The guilt was creeping up on Will again. He didn't have a lot of first-hand experience with healthy marriages, since his parents' union was an utter failure, but he figured that it was supposed to be about trust. Trust, honesty, commitment, and love.

Will didn't feel like he exemplified any of those values.

He looked at himself in the mirror again and sighed. This day wasn't about him. It was about giving Molly a husband, and Walter a father. It was about doing something in his life that wasn't about him, and hopefully doing some good in the process.

It was about forgetting Hannibal.

Will desperately needed to do something good. He needed to prove to himself that he *was* good, and that whatever beautiful darkness Hannibal saw in him could be overshadowed by whatever shred of goodness Molly saw in him.

Will never had a very stable sense of his identity, since he never really liked to examine himself in a way that allowed for true self-awareness. He was used to ignoring parts of himself that he didn't like, but Hannibal had changed that practice. Hannibal had taught him a lot about himself, things that Will would have rather ignored but Hannibal insisted on bringing into the spotlight, because he thought they deserved to be there. That Will, all of him, deserved to be recognized.

Will hated that Hannibal forced him to face all the things he would rather forget, and was now incapable of forgetting. At the same time, however, there was a warmth inside his chest that was pleased at the recognition, honored at the attention.

Will hated himself for those feelings.

He hoped that marrying Molly would teach him more good things about himself, or at least make it easier to forget the bad things. He hoped that marrying her would make him *normal*.

A clutch for balance.

Hannibal's past words to him were like a soft whisper in his ear. The situation was so similar to when Will kissed Alana, another lifetime ago, that a tiny laugh bubbled out of him.

He was aware of how awful it was to marry someone just to forget someone else. Will was painfully aware, but he didn't see how he had any other choice. Molly wanted this, and no matter how much Will's entire body was screaming at him that he didn't want it, there was a big part of him — a very selfish part — that wanted it as well.

He wanted the fresh start, and the clean slate. He wanted to be normal, or as normal as he could manage, and he thought the best way to do that was to live a normal life. Marrying a woman and being a father was the most normal thing to do for a man his age.

If his father was still alive, Will thought with another grimace, he'd be proud.

Will sighed and ran a hand through his hair. He remembered how terrible his proposal to Molly had been. They'd been watching a movie in Molly's cabin, one night after Walter had gone to bed, and Will caught a glimpse of her subconsciously rubbing her ring finger. Will had known what Molly wanted, but at that moment, for some reason, he couldn't ignore it anymore. He sighed, then without any fanfare asked Molly if she wanted to marry him. Molly beamed and said yes, and Will just mirrored her smile to mask the numbness he felt inside.

His father probably wouldn't have been so proud of his bluntness, but Molly was happy.

Will couldn't help but wonder if Hannibal would propose like that, with a simple question, or if he would go over the top and buy a ring, flowers, and chocolate before proclaiming his love for his chosen partner and persuading them to marry him.

Will cut off that train of thought with a scoff. Of course Hannibal would go the obnoxious route, if he ever had the urge. Will doubted he would. Hannibal Lecter viewed himself as a god amongst mortals, and nobody was worthy enough to stand beside him in an equal partnership as common as marriage.

It was obviously the reason why, at almost 50 years old, he'd never bothered to marry before, as per the cultural norm. Rationally, doing so would have helped him hide from law enforcement, but Will knew that Hannibal was so confident in his capabilities, rightfully so, that he'd consider such an endeavor completely unnecessary and pointless.

You're alone, because you are unique.

You're as alone as I am. And we're both alone, without each other.

Absently, Will trailed his fingers down his unbuttoned dress shirt and brushed over his abdominal scar.

Was there anyone whom Hannibal respected enough to marry? Will knew that Hannibal respected a few people, Margot, Alana, and Bedelia at the top of the list. Will knew that Hannibal considered him a friend because he could understand him, as a function of his empathy, but did Hannibal respect him?

Sometimes it sure didn't feel like it. Hannibal had played with his encephalitis, manipulated him, lied to him, and taunted him. Will remembered all of it, but somehow those crimes felt as if they weren't real. For some reason, in Will's convoluted mind, the fact that Hannibal did all those things before truly establishing a honest relationship with him negated their immorality.

What truly hurt Will was that Hannibal had abandoned him, that night in Baltimore after he killed Abigail. After Will had changed Hannibal, and Hannibal had changed him. After Will had chosen him, not Jack. Hannibal had abandoned him, and the next time Will saw him, he tried to kill him.

There was no way Hannibal respected Will enough to consider standing beside him, as equals. Nobody had fit the bill for Hannibal's future spouse, and he wasn't the exception.

It was a pointless train of thought anyway. Will had no desire to marry Molly, and he definitely didn't have a desire to marry *Hannibal Lecter,* of all people.

Will swallowed thickly as he raised the hand that had been gently caressing his belly scar up to his forehead. He hesitated, fingers hovering centimeters away from the mark, before something inside him broke and he touched the thin, raised scar tissue.

Why can't I escape Hannibal, even on my wedding day? Will silently asked himself, eyes focused on where his fingers touched his forehead scar in the mirror.

"Will!"

A knock on the bathroom door jolted him out of his thoughts. Molly sounded excited, much too excited for marrying Will.

"Are you almost ready?" she called through the door. "My mom wants to take a few pictures before we head over to the courthouse."

Will exhaled. "Almost ready, just give me a second."

"Okay!" Molly answered. "We'll be outside!"

Her footsteps faded away, and Will slid his gaze back to his reflection in the mirror. He made quick work buttoning up his shirt and doing his tie, feeling oddly formal in the black suit. He'd worn a suit in court because he was supposed to, an event with required attire that felt remarkably similar to the present situation. Will picked up a hairbrush, thinking that he couldn't remember the last time he'd worn a suit willingly, not because the situation called for it.

Actually, he did remember. It was when he met Hannibal in Florence, in front of *la Primavera* in the Uffizi Gallery.

Will paused in combing his hair and raised his eyes to the scar on his forehead again. Usually he covered it up with his hair, as the raised line of skin drew many puzzled looks and side glances if left exposed. He was planning to do the same now, as always, but something stopped him.

Molly took pity on him and suggested a small ceremony at the courthouse, with only her closest family in attendance. Will didn't have any family left to invite, and despite the announcement he printed in the newspaper he didn't expect anyone to show up for him. He only printed the news with Hannibal in mind, out of equal parts spite and curiosity.

Regardless, after Molly and Walter, there would only be about four or five strangers to make small-talk with. Four or five open stares at his scar.

For once, Will wasn't dreading the odd looks. He styled his hair back, leaving his forehead exposed, the scar like battle-worn armor.

He survived Hannibal, he could survive getting married.

Will took a deep breath, gave his appearance a last once-over, and opened the door to meet the next chapter in his luckless life.

It had been a week since Will's marriage announcement had reached Hannibal's ears, and he had calmed down considerably.

Time was a proven healing agent for adjusting to unexpected changes in life, and Hannibal was not immune to its effects. After a certain amount of time spent pretending to read his Spanish books when in reality glowering about the news, Hannibal found his anger lessening. The red tinge vanished from his vision, and he was able to use his strong emotions to plan action, instead of engaging in simpleminded reaction.

By putting the announcement in the newspaper for anyone to see, Will was challenging Hannibal to do something about it. He was essentially poking the beast for it to lash out, and once Hannibal's immediate fury faded, he was able to see Will's design.

Instead of angering him further, it brought Hannibal a large amount of satisfaction to know that Will still thought about him.

He could think of many reasons why Will would get married, falling in love being the least of them. Hannibal felt betrayed by Will's clear rebuke and attempt to move on from him, but at the same time he was pleased that the reasons for the marriage were highly likely to be related to Hannibal in some way. How could they not be?

Hannibal and Will were conjoined. Even when they weren't together, they were thinking of each other. Hannibal knew this because his thoughts were full of Will, and thus Will's

thoughts must be rich with Hannibal in return.

He preferred to interpret the marriage this way, instead of facing the possibility that Will had truly moved on from him. Hannibal was an optimist but he was also a realist, and his chosen interpretation exemplified both principles.

After understanding at least some of Will's mind regarding this matter, Hannibal decided not to orchestrate the immediate death of his chosen fiancée. It wouldn't be a punishment as much as a reminder, and Hannibal much preferred to extend that reminder in person.

That is, when Will visited him in person.

It was only a matter of time. Marriage might occupy Will's time now, but soon enough he would realize that his latest attempt to forget Hannibal proved unfruitful, break down, and come to visit. Either that, or Jack would drag him back to the FBI. Really, if Will didn't want to see Hannibal again then he shouldn't have shone a beacon to the players who were eager to pull him back into the game.

Throughout Hannibal's week-long emotional journey, Barney was his only visitor who noticed his intense moods. Hannibal was an expert in hiding his true emotions, and was satisfied that the only crack in his mild-mannered mask occurred when he first heard the shocking announcement. He was only human, a human burdened with lighting-fast reaction times.

He did not show any deviant emotion after that first time, but Barney still gave him a wide berth when delivering meals and mail. His fear was amusing to Hannibal, and he resolved not to inform the orderly of his strict policy on not harming the messenger of unsavory news. It was entertaining to watch Barney walk on glass around him, and a good reminder to the man of the darkness Hannibal hid behind his visage of beautiful art and polite manners.

Alana was entirely oblivious to Hannibal's mood during her daily visits, which were still laughably referred to as "therapy sessions". Hannibal traded verbal blows with her as usual, answering her attempted personal questions with one of his own, and retreated to his mind palace when she bored him.

However, during Alana's visit the day after Hannibal's resolution not to harm Will's new wife, *yet*, he decided to have a little fun.

"You appear ready to pop, as they say," Hannibal observed, nodding to Alana's heavily pregnant belly.

"I do appear that way, yes," she deadpanned.

Hannibal smiled. "May I inquire as to your due date?"

Alana studied him for a moment, then sighed. "It's in about a week."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "That is quite soon, Alana. As a doctor, I am required to recommend that you take a pause at work. All the stress might hasten your labor."

"And as a doctor myself, I reassure you that I'm fine," Alana replied blandly.

Hannibal crossed his arms behind his back, already amused by watching her bristle.

"Still, you are carrying a heavy load, physically speaking. I imagine the future Verger heir makes it difficult to travel," he smiled wider. "Especially long distances."

Alana stared at him.

"It does," she finally answered. "Although the drive from here to the Verger estate is not particularly long. Which you knew."

"I did know that," Hannibal agreed.

Alana pursed her lips, studying Hannibal like she knew he was referring to something but confused as to what it was. It was endlessly entertaining.

Hannibal gave her a small crumb as to his knowledge about Will's wedding, but she was too ignorant to realize it.

"Regardless of my personal circumstances," Alana said eventually, shaking her head, "I can still do my job. Our hour is up, Hannibal. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," Hannibal replied lightly.

He watched her as she slowly stood from her chair and waddled out of the room. When the door swung shut behind her, Hannibal briskly walked to his table and picked up his drawing pencil with a smirk. A sketch of Alana and her soon-to-arrive baby as the Madonna and Child would be a fine way to further mock his former student.

He passed the next few hours drawing silently, imagining Will's full-body laugh and genuine smile once he finally visited Hannibal in his cage and saw the amusing, blasphemous piece of art hanging clearly on the wall.

It was only a matter of time.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will woke up when he usually did these days, with the sun shining through the curtains to fall upon his face on the right side of the bed.

It was the day. The day Will had met Molly, and the day Hannibal got a life sentence.

Chapter Notes

I am SO sorry about the long wait everyone! Thanks for being so patient! Here it is, the last chapter ~ It takes place just a short month before the start of the second half of season 3. Their reunion is coming ;)

Enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke up when he usually did these days, with the sun shining through the curtains to fall upon his face on the right side of the bed.

He blinked at the bright light, and slowly withdrew a tired arm from the warm cocoon of blankets wrapped around him in favor of fumbling for his phone on the bedside table. After he retrieved his prize, Will rolled over to face Molly's side of the bed and escape the glaring beam of the morning sun. Molly was still asleep, as usual, so Will brought his phone up to his face and tapped the screen, groaning when he saw the date.

It was the day. The day Will had met Molly, and the day Hannibal got a life sentence.

Will was determined to handle today better than he had in the past. The first time, he'd gone to the bar and been fortunate enough to meet Molly, who distracted him with an engaging conversation. The second time had been about 6 months after he and Molly had gotten

married, and he'd spent it passed out on their couch, clutching a half-empty bottle of whiskey because Molly had been busy at a student-teacher conference for Walter.

Will made it a personal goal to spend today better than he had last year. No drinking. He'd spend the day fishing, or fixing some boat motors, or playing board games with Molly and Walter since thankfully there was no school or parent-teacher conference today. Third time's a charm, right?

Will sighed. He couldn't believe it had already been three years. Three years of Hannibal stuck in a prison cell, living but not thriving, not the way he was meant to. Three years without freedom, without being surrounded by nice things, without composing or listening to beautiful music, without *cooking*.

And of course, for Will — three years spent without Hannibal.

A stray thought crossed his mind and he blinked, sitting up and swinging his feet down to the floor to center himself. As of today, he and Hannibal had officially spent more time apart than they had together.

Since they met, up until the time Hannibal turned himself in, a little over two years had passed. But now it had been three years since Hannibal was sentenced to the BSHCI, even more than that since he'd turned himself in.

Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?

Mine? Before you, and after you.

Those words Will spoke in Florence had never felt more true. He could barely remember his life before Hannibal. Even before Hannibal had fucked with his head and framed him for serial murder, he had changed Will's life from their very first meeting. He had been someone so unique, someone entirely different from anyone Will had ever met, that he rocked Will's fundamental assumptions about other people and friendship. Then, as time went on and they came to see each other clearly, Will learned more about himself as a result of their constant push-and-pull.

The past that belonged to another man was labeled as “before Hannibal”, and the future that Will imagined he might attain was labeled as “after”.

However, as Will sat on his bed, muscles tense and bare feet touching the cold floor, he realized that these three years apart hadn’t yet ushered in that future. He still felt stuck in the present time, the time spent *with Hannibal*, rather than living in the time after him.

Will clenched his eyes shut, but this time from the pain instead of the bright sun. After all his efforts to forget Hannibal and move on, after getting married and starting a new family, nothing had changed. He was still living with Hannibal, and deep in his heart he wished — since he couldn’t *know*, not absolutely — that Hannibal was still living with him.

Will opened his eyes when a wet tongue started licking his clenched fist, and was met with the sight of Winston staring up at him expectantly. Will sighed, his original aims of not spending the entire day down a bottle already looking slim.

He got out of bed and shrugged some clothes on, dragging a hand over Winston’s head as he left the bedroom quietly. He passed Walter’s room, peeking in to see his step-son still asleep. It was still early, as Will had taken to rising when the sun rose. He’d always wondered when Hannibal woke up in the mornings. Will would bet it was early as well, if he ever slept at all.

He’d never had the privilege of seeing Hannibal with sleep-laden eyes. There’d been one time, right after they first met, when Will had shown up on Hannibal’s doorstep in the early hours of the morning after sleepwalking for the first time, and had witnessed Hannibal dressed in pajamas and a robe instead of his usual three-piece suit. The sight made him seem warmer. More human.

But Hannibal had been completely awake by then, even before his morning coffee. Will never got to see his tired eyes, or his drowsy expressions, or how his fine hair looked spread across the pillow.

Will wondered how he looked now, stuck in prison with none of his fine clothes and fancy hygiene products. Three years with only ugly prison jumpsuits and foul-smelling soap.

Will swallowed as he tugged his boots on. Prison was surely awful for Hannibal, if not for the lack of finery then for the distasteful food to his sophisticated palate and odious scents to his sensitive nose. Will had done that to him, Will had put him through that.

And as he thought about it now, three years after making the hard decision to do so, half of him regretted it bitterly, while the other half rejoiced in the punishment.

Buster barked then, drawing Will's attention from his thoughts of Hannibal to his pack of dogs waiting excitedly by the door.

"Alright, let's go then," Will conceded, opening the door and standing back as his many dogs ran outside into the fresh snow. He shrugged on his coat then joined them, making sure to close the door behind him as quietly as he could so he wouldn't wake Molly and Walter.

Will took a moment to breathe in the brisk, cold air before stepping off the porch and into the snowy yard. His dogs, now done with their business, followed him as he walked back around the cabin towards the woods. His morning walk with his pack through the forest was a daily routine, and Will especially needed the comfort that routine brought today.

The forest was peaceful as Will and his dogs explored it, the ground covered by a new coat of unblemished snow that sparkled when the dull yellow rays of the sun fell over it. Will heard a few birds begin to chirp as he ventured farther into the forest, and he briefly closed his eyes to focus on their song.

Will loved being out in nature like this. The fresh air and beautiful surroundings relaxed and centered him, reminding him that good things did exist and that he was allowed to enjoy them.

Walking through the trees quieted his mind, wiping away all the noise inside his head that existed because of Hannibal. Will knew that keeping Hannibal out of his mind would be harder today than every other day, but he tried to focus on this moment, out in the snowy forest with his dogs, where the only traces of Hannibal that existed were the ones irreversibly carved into his skin.

When the sun got higher overhead and Will's hunger started to make itself known, he whistled for his dogs and turned back to the cabin. He couldn't spend the whole day outside, although he'd certainly try to go fishing later. Maybe Wally would join him, if he didn't mind the cold.

It took a good while to make his way back home, after walking so far into the woods. When he did arrive, he stomped the snow off his boots before removing them and opening the door, once again letting the dogs rush in before following. He was met with a flood of warmth, the smell of fresh bacon, and the familiar sound of Walter's favorite video game coming from the living room.

"Want some breakfast?" Molly called from the kitchen.

Will was grateful for her thoughtfulness and made his way over to her, pressing a light kiss to the top of her head as he passed by to grab a plate. "Thank you, smells great."

"It's just bacon and eggs," Molly laughed. "Nothing special."

She piled some onto Will's plate and he shrugged before sitting down at the table and popping the first bite into his mouth.

"It's delicious," he praised softly.

Will winced as soon as those words came out of his mouth. They were the same ones he'd said to Hannibal, the first time he'd cooked for him.

A little protein scramble, to start the day.

Will groaned to himself and ate the rest of his breakfast at lightning speed. "It's delicious" was a common compliment to someone's cooking; was he going to be able to even look at

food at all today, if every little thing reminded him of Hannibal?

Knowing himself, probably not.

“What’s the plan for today?” Will asked, desperate for a distraction.

Molly hummed as she sat beside him with her own plate full of bacon and eggs. “Nothing specific. We could watch a movie, or play a game, or something else.”

Will put his fork down. “How about Monopoly?”

Molly blinked, then laughed incredulously. “*You* want to play Monopoly? You hate that game!”

“I don’t hate it,” Will defended. “It’s just a little much, sometimes. Too much activity.”

Molly studied him. “But not too much today?”

“No,” Will said softly, lowering his eyes. ”Not today.”

Molly nodded and took another bite of her food. “Okay then. Monopoly starts in 30 minutes. I’ll need a shower first if I’m gonna break a sweat by driving you to bankruptcy.”

Will cracked a thin smile. “You’re on.”

He stood to put his plate in the sink, and walked to the master bath to take his own morning shower. If he spent more time than usual tracing the thick scar on his belly or the thin line on his forehead, then nobody needed to know.

“Mr. Metcalf,” Hannibal greeted into the phone receiver. “To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?”

It was rather early in the morning, so Hannibal was intrigued when Barney wheeled in the portable telephone just moments after he had numbly eaten his breakfast. Hannibal hadn’t even had time to read the morning paper that was provided for him daily before his lawyer requested to speak with him.

“It’s a special day, Dr. Lecter. I just received notice that the federal courts have officially processed your insanity plea, finally,” Mr. Metcalf responded. “They accepted it, as expected.”

“Ah, so I can continue to exist in my cell instead of being shipped off to the needle,” Hannibal nodded. “Thank you for informing me of the news.”

“You’re welcome,” his lawyer said professionally. “Coincidentally, I believe today is also the third year anniversary of your sentencing to your current cell. How’s it been?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow in amusement. “That’s quite a personal question coming from you, Byron. If you are really so curious about my current state of affairs, surely you could’ve taken a trip out here to see it first-hand.”

“Unfortunately I am busy with work,” Mr. Metcalf replied, sounding calm and not at all rattled by Hannibal’s chiding. “I only asked because I heard that they’re keeping you behind glass, like some sort of a glorified fish tank. I can lodge a complaint with the hospital administrators, if you’d like.”

Hannibal chuckled, once again thinking that his regard for his lawyer was not displaced. “It is more similar to a terrarium than a fish tank, as it has a few holes kindly put in for air circulation. Thank you for your concern, Byron. I do not mind my cage.” Hannibal paused. “However, perhaps you could put in a word with Dr. Bloom about access to the prison

kitchen. I feel rather close to gaining access, but your input could be just the thing to push her into conceding."

"Tired of the bad food, are you?" Mr. Metcalf surmised. "Of course. Consider it done."

Hannibal hummed. "Thank you, Bryon. It's always a pleasure to hear from you."

"The pleasure's all mine. Goodbye, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal removed the phone receiver from his ear and placed it back into the tray, stepping away like he was supposed to so Barney could retrieve it and put it back on the phone cart. He nodded at Barney and walked back to his table, staring at the newspaper but not reading it. Mr. Metcalf had inadvertently given him a lot to think about.

The passage of time proved to be a bit harder to track in prison than Hannibal expected it to be. He came to rely on his daily paper for the date, instead of his internal clock. His circadian rhythms were a tad disrupted from the lack of natural light in his cell, and he found himself grateful for what light he did receive around noon every day from the tiny skylight in his ceiling.

It had been three full years since he'd taken up residence in his cage. Hannibal still refused to believe it was permanent residence, as he had faith that Will would eventually return for him, once his beloved realized that they couldn't survive separation. It had been three years though, and Hannibal hadn't expected it to take this long for Will to visit.

He supposed it hardly mattered. He would wait decades for Will, if that's what he required.

Besides, it wasn't as if Hannibal was starving for Will. He saw him every day, in his mind palace and in the sketches that were taped to the walls of his cell and hidden inside his books. He was informed of Will's activity by Barney every few weeks, after the orderly took his regular vacation up to Maine to check on him. Hannibal was continually impressed with the man's willingness to stalk someone, even if he was doing it for his children's education.

He never told Hannibal any specifics, but Hannibal didn't need him to. He loved listening to Barney's vivid descriptions of Will's clothing, hair, and facial expressions as he watched from afar, carrying out mundane errands in town like grocery shopping. Hannibal did not like to hear about Will's new wife and child, and Barney wisely knew not to mention them.

After every update, Hannibal drew Will as he imagined him from Barney's descriptions. Alana had grown used to his sketches being primarily of Will, and only sighed whenever she saw them. Hannibal sighed when he gazed at them as well, although for entirely different reasons.

Hannibal's focus was pulled back to the present by the soft scraping of a chair across wooden flooring. He looked up from the newspaper he hadn't read to see Alana gracefully taking a seat on the other side of the glass, indicating the start of their "therapy" session.

"How are you today, Hannibal?" she inquired, breaking the silence between them.

Hannibal clasped his hands together. "I'm well, thank you. How are you? I see that you've managed to reach your postpartum weight loss goal."

He nodded to her slim pantsuit, which he keenly noticed to be a size smaller than the one she'd worn last week.

"Yes, finally I have succeeded," Alana responded dryly. "But we're not here to talk about me."

"Why else would we be here?" Hannibal countered. "I have no intention of speaking about myself."

Alana just sighed.

"Your son is almost two now, how has it been?" Hannibal continued. "I imagine it's been difficult to function on almost no sleep, and make sure you are taking care of your child at the

same time. It would be so easy to slip up and accidentally cut a piece of fruit too large to safely swallow."

This was standard behavior for their sessions now. Alana would half-heartedly try to administer some sort of psychotherapy, Hannibal would completely rebuff her and mock her about her family, and she would ignore him until their time was up.

Hannibal enjoyed taunting her, but more than the cruel teasing itself, he relished in the irony of it. If Alana made a single attempt to actually do her job and think critically about their interactions, she would realize that Hannibal's fixation on her child was partly due to his own childhood experiences. He had done his fair share in taking care of Mischa when she was a baby, and speaking about Alana's child reminded Hannibal of those happy memories.

Normally he wouldn't be vulnerable with anyone in such a way as to so obviously think of Mischa when speaking, but the pleasurable rush of power Hannibal received after every session, during which Alana did not realize the underlying current of their subject matter, was an acceptable justification.

Simply put, Hannibal enjoyed fooling her. She could never truly understand him, and it was fun to take advantage of that fact.

"We have a cook to prepare meals for us," Alana deadpanned.

Hannibal smiled. "Ah, of course. The honored Verger family can easily afford such privileges."

"You say that as if you're not a Count," Alana rolled her eyes.

Hannibal ignored her weak attempt to direct the conversation back to himself. He considered making a jab against Margot, but suddenly that seemed quite boring. Insulting Alana's family and teasing her with Mischa was fun, but Hannibal wondered if he could push things a bit farther.

If she didn't pick up on little hints about Mischa, would she pick up on little hints about Will?

"On second thought," Hannibal mused, "you may not be completely drained when it comes to raising a child. You make a good point about utilizing servants to do some of the work, but I also imagine that for parents, raising a child hardly seems like "work". It's simply taking care of your own flesh and blood."

Alana narrowed her eyes, but nodded slowly.

"Of course, babysitting others' children is different," Hannibal continued. "It's easier to become frustrated, and harder to be forgiving."

"What would you know about babysitting?" Alana asked, unimpressed.

Hannibal smiled wider. "Likewise, I would think that it would be more difficult to raise a child you aren't attached to. Say, a step-child. Particularly, if you didn't bond with that step-child for very long before marrying their parent."

Alana stared at him, brow furrowed in confusion. "I suppose. Why…?"

Hannibal looked back at her with mirth sparkling in his eyes.

Although he originally only pursued this line of conversation with the purpose of deceiving Alana, his amusement did not fade at all when he watched her eyes slowly widen in horrified understanding.

It turned out that slapping her with her own incompetence was just as enjoyable as keeping her in the dark.

"You think you're so clever," she snarled, abruptly standing up. "Well, congratulations Hannibal. You just got someone fired."

“Have you figured out who yet, or will it take you a few hours of going through the silent security footage?” Hannibal wondered with a smirk.

Alana stormed off, and Hannibal knew with satisfaction that it was the latter.

A pleasant aroma of lemon and garlic filled the kitchen, and Will stood over the stove with a diligent spatula in hand. He didn’t cook often, since there were only limited dishes he could cook well, but today he marched into the kitchen with his freshly caught fish, intent on making dinner.

All culinary activities seemed cursed today, because of Hannibal, and instead of being a slave to that special kind of pain, Will decided to take control of it and dive headfirst, right into the fire.

Or rather, in front of the small fire on the stove, over which a large pan full of fish, lemon, garlic, and butter were cooking.

Will couldn’t decide if he’d made the right decision in cooking. He’d felt better earlier that day, when he had been distracted from the haunting image of Hannibal in a filthy prison cell by playing a long game of Monopoly with Molly and Walter. He’d even smiled a few times, when Walter made a particularly ambitious move and forced his mother into bankruptcy. The game had to be played with strategy, and Will was grateful for the opportunity to use his mind for a specific purpose that wasn’t about Hannibal.

After lunch and cleaning the game up, Will had taken Wally to the edge of the lake for a little fishing. They’d gotten comfortable with each other so that there was no need for either to talk, and the quiet companionship felt nice. It was nice, even if Will’s abdominal scar felt tighter than usual as he stood fishing beside a child that wasn’t Abigail, on the day that he’d effectively given Hannibal a life sentence.

He tried to tell himself that he should be proud. He had ensured that Abigail's murderer faced justice, and paid the price for taking her life.

But a snagging thought kept creeping back, whispering to him that if he hadn't betrayed Hannibal in the first place and ruined their little family, Abigail wouldn't have died.

Will had to stop fishing after that, when he started to smell the metallic scent of Abigail's blood. He'd announced that he and Walter had caught enough fish, three little trout to be exact, and they'd better get back before it started getting dark. The kid agreed, and after returning home and changing into more comfortable clothes, Will felt like he could breathe again.

That was when he marched right into the kitchen, cleaned the fish, and started cooking.

He could have asked Molly to cook. She'd had plenty of experience preparing his catches by this point, and had no doubt that she would've done so again if Will had asked. But he hadn't asked, and now, gazing down at the fish cooking in the pan, he thought he'd made the right choice.

It was strange, but Will felt more in control of himself now. The kitchen was undeniably Hannibal's domain, but by inserting himself in it purposefully, Will felt like he'd taken some of his power back.

He felt like he'd put Abigail to rest. She'd died in Hannibal's kitchen, so it was only fitting that she'd find peace, at least in Will's memory palace, in this kitchen, on the anniversary of Hannibal's confinement.

Will took a deep breath and smiled to himself. Maybe he could do this. Maybe, like Abigail, one day he'd find peace after Hannibal. It was hard to imagine, but maybe it was possible.

"Hey, Will?" Molly called from behind him. "I'm cleaning off the table for dinner, are you done with this?"

Will turned to see what she was referring to and froze.

Molly was standing by the kitchen table a few feet away, holding up that day's newspaper. Will hadn't read it yet, since he'd been busy trying to distract himself all day, but now he read the headlines clear as day.

One headline in particular took his breath away.

BRUTAL SLAYING OF FAMILY ON FULL MOON

It wasn't the biggest headline on the front page, as it was written in a slightly smaller bolded font and tucked off to the side of the main story, but the words were still clearly visible. There was even a picture of the family that had been killed; two parents with two children, a boy and a girl, both probably under 10.

Will didn't need to read the rest of the story to know that it wasn't your occasional, tragic, *isolated* massacre.

The fact that the entire family was killed, not just a certain member. The fact that the headline didn't indicate a murder-suicide, which was usually the cause when families turned up dead. The fact that it happened on a full moon.

Will only had a headline and a picture, but that was all he needed to know that it was the work of an experienced killer with some serious psychopathology. Exactly the type of monster he used to catch.

"Well? Have you read it?" Molly prompted, looking a little confused at his continued silence.

Will cleared his throat and stiffly turned back to the stove, where the fish was all but forgotten. "No. You can throw it out."

He clenched his eyes shut, gripped the spatula tight in his hand, and tried to tell himself that he was wrong, that it was probably some jealous mistress or obsessed coworker. That was it, nothing more threatening.

He told himself that, but he didn't truly believe it.

Will turned the stove off when he smelled the butter starting to burn. He distantly heard the popping of the lemon juice over the rush of blood to his head, and he gasped quietly.

Could it be a coincidence? The timing was so specific: the full moon, the anniversary of Hannibal's official incarceration… Could it all be some crazy coincidence?

It could be, except after all that he'd been through in his life, Will didn't believe in coincidence. Hannibal didn't either. Hannibal would call it fate.

Will didn't know what to call it. He just knew that, on top of all the pain he already felt from today, there was a sickly feeling in the pit of his stomach, and a cold shiver running down his spine.

His instincts were never off, and right now they were telling him something that he desperately tried to ignore. He failed, and was left with a dreaded truth.

The family in the paper may have been the first, but they certainly weren't going to be the last.

After Alana so rudely and unceremoniously rushed out of their therapy session, Hannibal spent the rest of the day reading through his mail. There was only the usual correspondence and fan mail, nothing out of the ordinary — until he'd picked up the newspaper he'd neglected earlier, and quirked an eyebrow at the front page.

It appeared that a fledgling killer was stretching their new wings.

Hannibal read the entire article about the Jacobi family, interested in how each member had been brutally killed under the light of the full moon. He was never as good as profiling as Will was, but he was proud of his affinity to recognize the beginning of greatness when he saw it.

The killer was almost certainly a man. As far as first impressions went, Hannibal thought he seemed quite shy. This boy was obviously experienced in cleaning up evidence, since the article indicated the police didn't have any leads yet. Hannibal imagined it wasn't his first murder, but the timing of the full moon held a certain significance. This killing was likely the first one that had *mattered*.

Hannibal smiled, wondering just how many more massacres it would take until Jack Crawford pulled Will back into the fray, and how many it would take until Will had a reasonable excuse to come visit.

Hannibal was drawn out of his newfound optimism for the future when Alana banged through the doors with a comically triumphant expression on her face.

"Barney Matthews has just been fired," she announced victoriously. "Your pipeline to the outside has been cut off."

Hannibal set the newspaper down pleasantly and rose from the table to approach the glass.

"Be that as it may," Hannibal said calmly, "I expect that I will continue to be informed about the most *important* matters."

"Oh please," Alana scoffed, putting her hands on her hips. "I've thoroughly chewed out the rest of the staff and placed an order for *microphoned* surveillance cameras. You won't be able to manipulate any more people here without me knowing about it."

Hannibal inclined his head. “I have no doubt about that, Alana. You surely run this hospital better than Frederick ever did.”

Alana narrowed her eyes.

Hannibal smiled and continued. “Of course, I’ll have no need for informants when dear Will comes to visit soon.”

Alana’s hands fell from her hips and her stony expression faltered. She stared at him with a tinge of anxiety behind her sharp eyes, knowing as well as Hannibal did that neither of them had breathed a word of Will since the first day of Hannibal’s incarceration. Even during Alana’s declaration of firing Barney and destroying Hannibal’s source of information, Alana hadn’t dared to specify what exactly the coveted information *was* , although she certainly knew.

“He isn’t going to visit,” Alana recovered, firm expression back as she took a step towards the glass. “No matter how many *drawings* you do, he’ll never see them. He’ll never come.”

“He will,” Hannibal said matter-of-factly.

“There’s no way,” Alana snarled. “He left without telling any of us where he was going, cutting off all contact. We only know where he is now because of the announcement in the paper when he got married. He didn’t come when Jack reached out to him, he didn’t come when I had a child. What makes you think he’ll come now? For you?!”

Alana finished her rant with angry eyes, breathing heavily. Hannibal blinked, a bit surprised that Alana had taken Will’s departure so personally. It wasn’t about her. It never was.

“You’re not a prophet,” Alana sighed, shoulders dropping as her anger left her. She looked up to meet Hannibal’s eyes through the glass. “He won’t come.”

“I am not,” Hannibal agreed. “I am something different.”

He walked forward until the glass was inches away from his face, until the soft evening light illuminating the middle of his cell faded away to leave his face in shadows.

“Beasts are stirring,” Hannibal smiled. “And the lamb is coming.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who read this and liked it!

If you want to know what happens next, hop over to my season 3 rewrite fic, I do a rewrite of each episode and I just posted the direct "sequel" to this fic — when Hannibal and Will reunite in the Great Red Dragon episode.

You can also follow me on twitter :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!